# Historic Royal Palaces Podcast

# The Six Tudor Queens: Catherine Howard with Gareth Russell

## **Show Notes**

Catherine Howard has been judged by generations as promiscuous, a silly girl, a victim. But of course, there is more to her story than these assumptions allow for.

In the fifth episode of our Six Tudor Queens series, Tracy Borman is joined by historian and author Gareth Russell, to bring Catherine to life. They paint a picture of a vivacious young woman whose life deserves to be revealed without the layers that centuries have placed upon her.

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

[See inside the Haunted Gallery with a virtual tour of Henry VIII’s Tudor Palace.](https://artsandculture.google.com/story/oAVRshA9gG0J9w)

[Learn more about the life of Catherine Howard.](http://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/history-and-stories/catherine-howard/)

## **Transcript**

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

[The podcast opening theme music begins. It is steady and regal. Tracy’s voice comes in on top. She speaks clearly, from the studio, with a measured pace, but sounds excited about this new series.]

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 will 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 temperament. So join me as we dive into the world of The Six Tudor Queens.

[The theme music finishes and fades out. Tracy reads the episode’s content warnings with a serious tone.]

### Tracy Borman [00:01:24]

Please be aware that this episode contains some sexual and psychological themes that some listeners may find distressing.

### Tracy Borman [00:01:34]

[After a beat of silence, the sound changes. Tracy is now in a large, echoey space. She speaks in a clear and excited tone.]

Welcome listeners, to the fifth episode in our Six Queens series, and I'm standing here in The Great Watching Chamber at Hampton Court, where in former times, courtiers would have, as the name suggests, waited and watched for the king and queen to appear from my favourite doorway in the whole palace, just to our right here, which led through into the private worlds of Henry the VIII and indeed the six queens.

Well, I am thrilled to bits because I'm joined by the simply brilliant Gareth Russell, biographer, historian, broadcaster and most importantly, for the purposes of our podcast this evening, expert – not just on the fifth queen we're going to be discussing, but on Hampton Court.

Gareth's new book is all about the palace, its people, its events, its social history. Well, Gareth, welcome.

### Gareth Russell [00:02:38]

[Gareth Russell has a Northern Irish accent. He speaks a little faster than Tracy, and his voice sounds excited and humorous.]

Thank you so much for having me. And this is an extraordinary space to start our chat about Catherine.

### Tracy Borman [00:02:44]

Isn't it? So, you were saying earlier that you feel like you can have a party in here, don't you?

### Gareth Russell [00:02:49]

Yes.

**Tracy Borman** [00:02:49]

It is about the right size.

**Gareth Russell** [00:02:50]

It is. Well, it probably shows my delusions or aspirations of grandeur, whichever you prefer to go with. [Tracy laughs]. But it is a pleasantly colossal space, which I think summarises Hampton Court too. This is a long, gorgeously curated, I think, room as well, but it gives the census, you say, of watching and waiting. But also, the Tudor court is never quite static. Even when you're watching, you're doing something. There's socialising, there's business, there's games. You're kept warm by the fireplace and this sort of, somewhere between cosy and splendid and functional and extravagant – that's what The Great Watching Chamber is. And it really summarises the world of the royal Tudor court that existed here at Hampton Court.

### Tracy Borman [00:03:29]

And of course, it's a world that one of your most celebrated subjects would have known very well, Catherine Howard. So the fifth of the Tudor queens, who we are exploring in this series, and Catherine Howard came here as queen.

### Gareth Russell [00:03:48]

She did. That's a really important point. So, if we look up sort of gorgeous gold leaf work on the roof, that's sort of the perfect metaphor for what Catherine saw at Hampton Court. She had been a maid of honour, a lady in waiting for Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves but the court itinerary shows us the court in that sort of farcically short time that poor Anne was queen, or lucky Anne was queen. They didn't make it to Hampton Court. So actually, when Catherine came here for the first time in August 1540, she saw this as queen. And actually, you can say to some extent, her marriage was born at Oatlands Palace, which is no longer with us, but her ***queenship*** was born here because the official proclamation that she was Queen of England and Lady of Ireland was made here, from here, in August 1540.

So, she ***saw*** this queen. And I would always like to think of Hampton Court as the christening and the funeral of her time as queen. I think you know it really whilst the marriage happened at Oaklands and ***of course*** the execution happened in London, her downfall was here and so her greatest moments as queen. And here, this, this wonderful space is probably one of my favourite rooms in the palace, gives you an idea of that sort of sybaritic magnificence that she she revelled in, because I think she was a queen who had, you know, ***looked*** the part, certainly, but also, she was very well trained in etiquette. So, she ***shone*** in her time at Hampton Court. And that's why I like about spaces like this.

### Tracy Borman [00:05:13]

So how does it make you feel? You've written about this place so much, you've written about the woman we're going to be discussing so much, but you can't beat actually being in situ, can you?

### Gareth Russell [00:05:23]

No, you can't at all. And I feel so different to how I expected, actually, because firstly, you know, we're more or less alone here. It's that you feel the air is a bit different. You're slightly, maybe it's your imagination, it probably is, but you feel closer to the past and that silence is the noise of that connection, I think.

And the reason why I like being in here is it reminds me of that side of Catherine that we don't really get to talk about a lot, which is the very ***vibrant, alive*** Catherine, the fun Catherine, the extravagant Catherine, the Catherine who loved to dance and sing and give gifts. So actually, it makes me quite – nostalgic is not the right word because I never met her, but nostalgic for that sense of that really ***potent*** sense of being ***alive*** that she had. And I think you get a real, real sense of that here.

### Tracy Borman [00:06:14]

Well, Gareth, you have ***encapsulated*** this space so brilliantly in how it related to Catherine Howard. But that's not actually where we're going to do most of our chat today, because there's one part of Hampton Court that is most famously associated with Henry's fifth queen and that's the place we're going to walk to right now. So should we go?

### Gareth Russell [00:06:39]

Yes, please.

[Creaking floorboards as Gareth and Tracy walk together.]

### Tracy Borman [00:06:46]

Gosh, we really have got this place to ourselves. You can hear our footsteps echoing around this empty chamber.

### Gareth Russell [00:06:52]

It's wonderful because I think, I mean, as a history nerd, you always sort of dream of the moment of having it so yourself.

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### Tracy Borman [00:06:57]

Yes!

**Gareth Russell** [00:06:58]

And even I mean, we're walking past one of my favourite little rooms. I keep saying favourite rooms, I love it all. [Tracy laughs] It is the Pageboys Chamber, where we get the sense of what it was like for servants to live and work here. Sometimes I, in the same way we sort of forget the crew of the Titanic, you forget the people whose labour made this possible and I think Hampton Court is very much a story of two halves and when you step into the Haunted Gallery like we just have. You also see that other half, which is splendour and sorrow equally at the same time.

### Tracy Borman [00:07:25]

Well, as you say, Gareth, we have just stepped into the Haunted Gallery. Could I just point out that evening is drawing in and it's October. ***And*** this is renowned as being the most haunted part of Hampton Court. We have many ghost stories here, but apparently there have been more fainting and more ghostly experiences, in fact, including mine. The only vaguely ghostly experience in my whole time at Hampton Court. But I don't want to necessarily dwell on that. It's just so atmospheric. Regardless of your opinion of such ghostly matters, it's got atmosphere, hasn't it?

### Gareth Russell [00:08:07]

Totally. It really, really does. And I think looking at it, I mean, for instance, just for listeners, the door at the far end is closed and usually when you're here as a visitor, you can see into the baroque wing and into the other centuries. But with those doors closed, all of a sudden, you're trapped in the 1540s, you're ***just*** seeing the Tudor architecture and it does, it's inextricably linked to Catherine's story. I mean, we spoke about the brighter times in The Great Watching Chamber, but here you are at the nexus of her end and the tragedy that overtook her.

### Tracy Borman [00:08:43]

So, tell us about that. How does this space relate to Catherine's downfall?

### Gareth Russell [00:08:48]

So, one of the most enduring legends about Catherine and Hampton Court is that she ran towards where we're standing, actually, halfway towards where we're standing ***down*** this gallery as her downfall erupted in the autumn of 1541, and she was trying to get to her husband, who was hearing mass just off the gallery, to beg him for mercy and not to listen to a series of very damaging revelations about her private life that at ***this*** stage were limited to (but still importantly, limited to pre-marital matters).

Principally, that she had not only had a fully sexual relationship with a fellow ward in her grandmother's household, but that she had promised to marry him, which, if anyone's familiar with canon law in the Tudor periods, is a combination of action with promise. That means that technically she and Francis Durham, her alleged lover, were ineligible to marry anybody else so she is, at this point, when she makes this alleged dash down the corridor, she's facing the end of her queenship. It's not yet certain that will mean the end of her life, but certainly she's facing the ruin of her, of her dreams and her hopes.

She allegedly comes into the queen's apartments through those closed doors at the end of the corridor, and she makes it a third, a quarter, halfway down this gallery before the guards, who have been tasked with keeping her in her apartments, catch her and drag her back. And allegedly, Catherine was screaming for mercy as they dragged her, and she never ***did*** see Henry again. So, there's a great line in, I'm not going to butcher this line, but it's an Antonia Fraser's biography of Mary, Queen of Scots, where she says, ‘sometimes you go in as a biographer, expecting to pull away the cobwebs of myth, but every now and then you get to put one back’. And so, with this legend, I was of the impression that it was nonsense, and it was impossible and there's no way that she could have done it.

So, what I will say is a lot of things have to line up for it to be possible that she did it, but there is a time there's a window that she could have done it, and she would have had to have been very fast on her feet but you are when you're filled with adrenaline. [floorboards creek] So, there was a slight creak and a crumble, so I hope that's not Catherine telling me that I'm completely wrong.

### Tracy Borman [00:11:01]

[Tracy Laughs].

Well, let's hedge our bets a bit here!

[Gareth Laughs].

### Gareth Russell [00:11:05]

So, on Sunday, the 6th of November 1541. That's when she could have done it. That morning, she was told by a delegation headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Winchester, who informed her of the charges against her. That evening, Henry left Hampton Court and went back to the Palace of Whitehall, and they never saw each other again. So, it's that window. It is that Sunday, and also that would fit with his hearing mass. There's ***a lot of things*** that line up about this. The trick, the tricky part is, the baroque wing that lies beyond those doors is on top of what was her, her apartment.

So, we don't know if ***physically*** the layout would have enabled her to make it. So, what I would say is...it is possible that she did it. It's not impossible. This idea that the dash, the haunting couldn't have happened is not true. All I would say is that it - that doesn't necessarily mean it's likely. I've searched and searched over the course of two books and I can't find where the story originates. That's what's very interesting about it. It seems to be an oral tradition going back centuries, whether that makes it less or more likely, that's up to you, as the historian and reader, to decide. All I can say is, from what I saw and what I looked up, both in the biography of Catherine and the Palace about Hampton Court, is I didn't find anything that ***to me*** means that she couldn't have made that dash here.

### Tracy Borman [00:12:25]

So interesting and challenges things that I've heard during my time here. Oh, it couldn't possibly have been this stretch of corridor, but in fact, it could.

### Gareth Russell [00:12:34]

It could have been, it certainly would have been where she was going. And I think you have to remember that. She was being slightly again, this is part of the variables, she was being limited from company and contact.

So, it's possible that because the queen's apartments were under guard after the scandal broke, that many of the rooms, the ***quasi-public*** rooms that we assume she couldn't have gotten through in time actually would have been empty. So, she might have been able to get to the main door and go. Whether that means she did or not, I don't know! I'm not brave enough to pin my colours to the mast on that one, but it's quite nice to say actually, this myth might have something to it.

### Tracy Borman [00:13:15]

Yes, yes, I love that. Great. That means I'm going to tell that ghost story even more now. [Gareth Laughs].

Fantastic. Well, Gareth, can we just go back a bit and can you tell us the basics about Catherine? Who was she?

### Gareth Russell [00:13:31]

She's a fascinating person, I think, because she was born into a world of want and privilege. So, she was born to that most luckless character in English aristocratic history, the younger son of a very wealthy man. So for a while, there was a discussion about – it was sort of the 1990s and the 2000s.

I know Joanna Denny, in her biography, thinks Catherine was born as late as 1525, and we no longer think that that's particularly possible, partly because I spent some very dust coated months in archives looking at wills that seemed to indicate from her family she was born earlier, but also because the Queen's household didn't accept 14 and 15 year olds as maids of honour. They accepted 16. So we think that the most likely date of birth was 1522, probably 1523, if I had to be a betting man. She's born almost certainly in Lambeth, where her father, Lord Edmund Howard, of Tudor fame, the Duke of Norfolk's younger brother and Edmund is a man of great potential and no results [Tracy Laughs] is the best way to describe him, and he's very heavily in debt.

Anne Boleyn, who I always like to think of as that kind of compulsively useful person, like she just felt she was smarter, and she often was than people. So she liked to swoop in and be very, very useful and help with the family. And no one could help poor old, slightly too fond of the bottle and two fond of bills he couldn't settle, Uncle Edmund, and a little bit like putting the poacher in charge of the game, she put him in charge of the financial administration of Calais, but it at least got him out of the country and his creditors and the people looking for him.

But at that point Catherine, whose mother had already died, is sent as ward, as many were – she's about eight years old at this stage. She is sent to live with her step grandmother, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk. And there's a lot of stories that we hear and a lot, and I feel like I'm always bashing Victorian historians, but here we are.

### Tracy Borman [00:15:35]

They deserve it!

[Gareth Laughs]

### Gareth Russell [00:15:35]

So there's this idea that the Victorians really peddled, Agnes Strickland in particular, ***really*** went to town on this, and she presented the Dowager Duchess as this flighty, quasi-amoral, dilettante who ran a ramshackle establishment that was one step above Saint Trinian's in terms of its disaster and maintaining discipline. And really, that's because (and we'll come back to this in a little bit when we talk about Catherine's private life) the ***Victorians*** had a very rigid idea of what was upstairs and what was ***downstairs*** in aristocratic households and as you know, Tudor households did not have that. One of the things – and this is why sometimes you always talk to historians outside your field of expertise - I was talking to a social historian when I was doing my postgraduate dissertation on Catherine, and I said, ‘oh, they were all in their beds’. And he went, ‘no, they weren't’. And I said ‘they were. All the girls in the dormitory were in their beds’. And he said, ‘there's no way that they were in beds because they're so expensive’. And then when we saw that they were beds, his argument was, ‘the Duchess must have been an incredibly generous patron of her granddaughter and her wards to pay for beds for them, because that was an almost unheard-of luxury’. You remember, Shakespeare leaves that as one of his most prized possessions.

### Tracy Borman [00:16:53]

Yes, the second-best bed.

### Gareth Russell [00:16:54]

Second best bed, which is both a gift and something of a hideous insult.

[Tracy and Gareth Laugh].

### Gareth Russell [00:17:00]

But Catherine goes into a household that is actually quite well run, and it's very ***happy*** for a while. It is an indulgent household in the sense that: where hierarchy kicks in is Catherine and her brother Henry are very much treated as the Duchess's grandchildren, and they are considered ***above*** a lot of their playmates and classmates. But she passes her time in a relatively standard aristocratic education.

We do know (if you've seen her later infamous love letter to Thomas Culpeper that she had quite a neat hand) So there has to have been an element, not as neat as Anne Boleyn's. Again, compulsive overachiever, [Tracy laughs] but I think it shows there was a decent amount of education and literacy, calligraphy, but really, it's music and what was sometimes called ‘the feminine graces’ of ‘the feminine crafts’. There's a massive emphasis on manners. Etiquette is really something that Catherine excels at and that to us, you know, we sort of have an idea that being a bit frivolous, but actually etiquette is something that there are so many nuances and subtleties to. We have such an idea of her as sort of flightier and insubstantial but if you look at accounts from when she was alive, the comments on how well-mannered she was, how she handled situations so well, that's a tribute to that etiquette education that she had in her grandmother's care.

### Tracy Borman [00:18:20]

That ***really flies in the face*** of so much I've read and so much that I realise now is based on those Victorian authors [Gareth agrees] who were just layering on their own experience of society, and it's completely incongruous.

### Gareth Russell [00:18:35]

Yes. Well, it is because I think Victorian society was class obsessed really – I mean, that's not to say the Tudors weren't, but the Victorians had a very rigid three tier system, and you existed within it and the idea that you would put the Duke's granddaughter, by this point, the Duke's niece, into a dormitory with, quote unquote, ‘servants’, was to them anathema and what they did was they created a narrative that has recently been sort of resurrected, but they saw some of the men Catherine was involved with and her friends as ***lower class***. And I use that word not working because they use ‘lower’ and it didn't just mean socioeconomically, it meant ***morally.*** The Victorians believed the lower classes had lower looser morals, and they could not conceive at all of a girl from an aristocratic background having sexual urges or being involved with men before marriage and so Agnes Strickland in particular crafted a narrative in which the quote unquote ‘servants’, the lower classes, deliberately corrupted Catherine and brought her down to their amoral, immoral standards and if you read this ***juggernaut*** of a bestseller in the Victorian period, Strickland actually says, ‘I am using Catherine Howard to warn all good girls of the dangers of the first accidental steps in sin’. So, that's where we get this idea and it starts with this ramshackle... it's a basically a terrible boarding school idea.

**Tracy Borman** [00:20:03]

Yes!

### Gareth Russell [00:20:03]

But it snowballs out from there and really, we are still struggling to extricate Catherine from the layers of Victorian judgement about how she was brought up.

### Tracy Borman [00:20:15]

That's fascinating. So right from the earliest accounts that we have of Catherine, her story has been stolen, shaped by later narratives, and actually in a very misleading way. This is not at all how Catherine grew up and how her story started to unfold.

### Gareth Russell [00:20:34]

Well, I think that's absolutely right. And the ‘stolen’ verb, I think is, is, is exactly it. Because one of the things that I mean, the ***joy*** of writing her biography, I have to say, Tracy, is that I could she was queen for such a short period of time that you went deep – everything was deep with it and that I loved, but when you're dealing with a life as short as hers was, to take anything away from it when so much was taken from her, it just seems to me such a fundamental shame.

### Tracy Borman [00:21:04]

Yeah, absolutely. So she has this, this upbringing with her, her step grandmother. And there is this relationship with Henry Manox.

### Gareth Russell [00:21:14]

Yes.

### Tracy Borman [00:21:15]

So can you tell us a bit more about that?

**Gareth Russell** [00:21:17]

Yes. So this is one of my sort of (we're so close to the chapel). This is a *mea culpa* moment. One of the great regrets I have about my career is I wish I had phrased some things differently in *‘Young and Damned and Fair’* about Henry Manox. I was very dismissive of it, of this current narrative that he was essentially a paedophile and that there was an element of grooming and abuse and I, I do stand by it, I think that was a complete misreading of the sources. But I also think what we have to understand about history is that we… As the snowball of the story rolls it picks up the dirt of each new generation, it's trying to hold onto it and, and grapple with. And we are a generation that's asking really important questions about consent and about sexual politics and dynamics and whilst I do believe that the idea that Manox was a paedophile is based on misreading what the role of a music tutor was, who was in the room, what her age was, what his age was, I approached that paragraph from the perspective of: I was only writing about Catherine. Sometimes I wish I'd gone back and said, look, I understand why this is so emotional to people, but then I think it's a ***tough*** one to answer to. The eternally tough question for a historian.

So Henry Manox, just a loathsome individual. But Henry Manox is her music tutor, one of her music tutors. So there is another one, called Barnes, I believe, Robert Barnes and it's basically group music lessons, which is fairly standard. So we've talked a little bit about the Victorian concept of servants being stuck onto the story and in the same way, the concept of teacher is stuck on from a modern perspective. So the idea of him being her music ***teacher***, and her being the student creates a very problematic dynamic for us.

However, a music tutor should be kept (as it was often in the household accounts) it should be kept separate in our mind from, say, someone like Roger Ascham or or someone who was, properly tutoring things like or George Buchanan, someone who's tutoring classics or rhetoric or theology or history. ***Music*** is taught very differently. It's often someone roughly your same age, and usually it's someone who's just playing ***with you*** in group environments. So the idea of a classroom-esque dynamic in which she was groomed, is mercifully untrue.

However, Manox is a problem because they have some level of physical intimacy, and this is one of the moments I just sort of fell in love with Catherine slightly: Manox then, like so many insufferable teenagers with a guitar before and since, [Tracy and Gareth Laugh] cannot ***resist*** bragging about it to other people and he tells people in the household, and obviously in the same way a high school works, if there's a rumour about someone, it will find them with heat seeking efficiency. [Tracy and Gareth Laugh].

And it gets back to Catherine and she's absolutely outraged. And rather than sort of, you know, she goes and talks to him and he again, the stereotype of a musician, cries and says, ‘the only reason I said it is I love you so much’. And Catherine essentially says, ‘well, that's tough because we're over’. And she ends it and she goes for a walk in the orchard with him and says, ‘no, it was completely unacceptable what you did and you said, goodbye’. She then moves on to a relationship with Francis Dereham that Henry Manox takes very badly and he's ***such*** an awful person, just a small, tiny little man and he ***leaves*** a note in the Duchess's pew at mass saying ‘by the way, I would go up to the dormitory after hours and see what everyone's getting up to’, and Francis finds out about this and sort of beats Manox up.

So there's all, there's a lot of drama going on in this household. So, Manox is inappropriate, unlikeable, but the dynamic that we, as a modern society have perceived of her being a teacher pupil grooming relationship, is not backed up by him being referred to as ‘young Manox’ either. The indicator is these were group lessons with the second music tutor and other members of the household, and that then at some point, ***much later on***, probably about 1538, when she's 15 or 16, it starts to develop into a romantic and quasi sexual relationship that she then terminates.

### Tracy Borman [00:25:40]

So she does have a bit more agency than ***modern*** narratives have given her, because, I mean, that pulls apart the traditional views of Catherine being, I've seen her described as a ‘pretty feather brain’ by one sort of early 20th century author, all the way through to the ‘Me Too’ generation. And actually, the truth is somewhere in between!

### Gareth Russell [00:26:04]

It is, I mean, I remember. I can't remember. I think it was Alison Plowden’s book, back in the 70s, but it was one of my first books that I ever bought in a second-hand bookstore. I think she was described quite seriously as an ‘empty-headed tart’. I mean, I mean, and you read it and you think ‘I have to have misread this’?

### Tracy Borman [00:26:23]

Yes.

### Gareth Russell [00:26:24]

There definitely, there have been...but, there's been these judgements about all six of them, hasn't there? I think people take them and fit them into a mould.

### Tracy Borman [00:26:33]

Yes.

**Gareth Russell** [00:26:33]

That they want them or need them to be and Catherine, yes, there have been, there's been the Victorian warning and she's kind of been used again I think in the 21st century as a warning in a different way. And certainly, that brilliant, very emotive song that's given to her in the musical *‘Six’* that is her as a warning again – that's, that's the narrative that's given. I love that song.

### Tracy Borman [00:26:55]

So pleased you mentioned that.

### Gareth Russell [00:26:57]

Yeah, yeah. So good. But sorry, I get distracted by the sparkle of ‘*Six’*. [Tracy Laughs]. So, I think when you're looking at Catherine, you tend to see the shadow of the axe quite a lot. And what I mean by that is obviously the end shapes the beginning. And as a historian, you can't totally divorce yourself from hindsight. But part of the frustration I have had, and I think a lot of Tudor readers have had, is that there is a sense that if you suggest that Catherine made any mistakes or if Catherine, you know, had romantic or sexual urges, then somehow, you're suggesting she deserved what happened on the scaffold.

And to be fair, I certainly have had comments and interactions with readers where they have said that. Where they have said, ‘well, she was so stupid, or she did this, she did that, therefore, she kind of brought it on herself’, which is a really interesting take because I actually I mean, as we will discuss it's not true that what she did was illegal at all, that that's a really important note.

However, the other side of her as being, kind of Ariadne or, who is it... Iphigenia, the sacrifice on the rocks and the virgin sacrifice and things simply happened ***to*** her. I understand the appeal of that, that tragic figure. All I would say is that so much of her life was taken from her, to take the liveliness from her beforehand seems a real shame too.

So, she ***did*** have agency, Tracy, she could be at times, particularly with some of her servants, she could be quite demanding, and she could be quite inconsiderate. But I like those little rougher edges to her because it makes her human again.

### Tracy Borman [00:28:42]

Absolutely. And that brings me on ***very neatly*** to my next question, which is if Catherine were to walk along the Haunted Gallery now and, and greet us, who would we see? Can you describe Catherine? But not just physically, but as a character. How do you see her?

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### Gareth Russell [00:28:59]

That's interesting you say not just physically because she's described in eyewitness accounts with superlatives, but not specifics. It's very interesting, so with Anne Boleyn, for instance, we have great comments about the eyes and sometimes of Katherine of Aragon, we have the hair comment. And with Katherine Parr we've, we've ‘good portraits’ and then there's, then there's Catherine. And so again, interestingly, the Victorians, based on a dodgy sketch that we all no longer think is her, came up with the idea of her being very short and plump or curvaceous. That's actually not backed up. She's described as very little. So the height they get right, we wouldn't be seeing a tall person walking towards us. We would be seeing someone quite thin. Slender is the word used, but the word over and over again is ‘beautiful’. They just say she's very beautiful. A palace servant called William Thomas, who at this point worked for John Dudley, so he worked in and around where we're standing but he then went on later to become a clerk of the Privy Council. He says she was a ‘great beauty’, so we don't exactly know, apart from the fact: slender and short and beautiful, that's it and so, and obviously, we all know the unending roulette of portraits with the Tudor queens. So, we really don't have one of her, potentially, or not one that we can be certain of.

In terms of her personality she had (and this is not meant to sound flippant) that indefinable quality of ‘cool’, she really ***had*** it. And she comes across as great fun and very engaging. And she could organise fun, and she could organise people. We also see someone immaculately dressed; very fond of her jewellery. She had a fabulous jewellery collection that just kept getting bigger and bigger.

I personally hope she would be wearing the bejewelled brooch Henry gave her with scenes from the life of Noah, and I just I'm wondering how large it had to be for you to make out the Ark. And the two-by-two animals. So we know that she had that. So I would love to see that, and probably wearing the French hood. So we know from Charles de Marillac, who was the French ambassador, that she preferred the French cut of dresses and, and hats as well, and headdresses. So we would have seen someone dressed at the height of fashion for, say, 1540, 1541, which probably means I think it looks eight kinds of hideous but, you know, fashion changes. When the French hood went so far back, they had to put that chinstrap underneath to hold it in place. She would probably be wearing that.

### Tracy Borman [00:31:29]

I'm sure she could carry it off.

### Gareth Russell [00:31:30]

Yeah, of course, absolutely. I mean if you've got a brooch with like the Ark and Noah on it, you absolutely can pull off a couple of chin straps. [Tracy laughs]. So I think dress is the height of fashion, glittering head to toe. And she probably would be organising a fantastic drinks reception in The Great Watching Chamber.

### Tracy Borman [00:31:45]

This is somebody who is now not leaping from the page, leaping from our discussion, who I myself have just fallen into the trap of seeing her as a stereotype, that things are ***done to*** her. She doesn't really have that kind of powerful personality that you've just described. She would, she'd have been noticed, wouldn't she?

### Gareth Russell [00:32:06]

Oh, totally. But look, the Howard women have, J.J. Scarisbrick said it once about Anne Boleyn, and I think it applies to a lot of them. He says, ‘I don't know what it was, but she must have been a young lady with charisma just seeping out of her fingertips’. [Tracy Laughs]. And I think that's Catherine, I think there's something that runs through the Howards because they all, they kind of all make an impression across the 16th century, those Howard women. [Tracy agrees]. So she had, yes, she had that indefinable star quality and I, I hope that people I love that you said that because I sometimes feel like we look at this tiny little candle being snuffed out and you forget there was a whole candelabra at one point of personality traits and ambitions and who she might or could have been had she lived longer.

### Tracy Borman [00:32:48]

But let's not forget, she's just a teenager when she enters the Tudor court. So if you, as you said, it was about 1522, 1523, she was born. And then she enters the service of Anne of Cleves. And so, she's kind of in her mid-teens.

### Gareth Russell [00:33:06]

She is probably about 16. Yeah, yeah. Because one thing that's interesting and this is one sort of documentary jigsaw with the Tudor court. But for instance, we know from actually, again, here at Hampton Court, Jane Seymour very firmly says about the Basset sisters, ‘they can't come until they're 16’, in 1537 and we also know that when they were reconvening the Queen's household in 1539 to fit for Anne of Cleves in 1540, Henry VIII, (probably through Thomas Cromwell who really wanted to limit the Queen's household's notorious ability to haemorrhage money) that they were very strict on the numbers and the rules, so I would suggest that they probably are still enforcing 16 in about 1539.

### Tracy Borman [00:33:50]

So she's very young by any standards really. What I would like to get your take on, Gareth, is how much of ***all of this*** of her, her rapid rise was due to Catherine and her personal attractions, how much to her powerful Howard relatives?

### Gareth Russell [00:34:08]

Love that, because it's probably... it's probably, if I was asked again to rant about history, the one thing (I'm guilty of this because I felt that going into writing, ‘*Young and Damned and Fair’*) But actually, it was the biggest surprise. The family did not plant her. They didn't plot to make her queen. I'm always interested in our desire, our unconscious collective desire to see plots in history, because I think it makes it less frightening to realise the unquantifiable power of the accident and luck.

So, very much the Howards get her this place, and the Duke of Norfolk is flexing his social muscles. He gets, three of his dependents, these places as maids of honour. And it's a nice little middle finger to Cromwell. We're still here, but, this whole idea that they were plotting the rise is not backed up by two things: The first is the Duke of Norfolk's out of the country when it happens, he's on a diplomatic mission to France and there's a ***fabulous*** moment in the sources that just blows apart everything we think of Norfolk. He arrives in France and goes to negotiate this new anti-Habsburg treaty (one of the 3000 negotiated across the 16th century) But he goes to confront Francois' sister Queen Marguerite and he's negotiating, and she says ‘you're talking to the wrong person. If you want to get the king's ear you have to go to his mistress, Madame d'Etampes’. And Norfolk says, well, like, ‘why would a mistress have any authority?’ He doesn't, it doesn't enter his head that a woman can move a king's mind at all, which is so against the idea we have of Norfolk using the women in his house. Now he does later, but in 1540 that idea had not entered his head at all, to the point that I think Queen Marguerite thought he was quite stupid, and she might have been onto something. [Tracy Laughs]. So he's out of the country at this crucial moment.

The second comment that gives it away is that in 1541, the Privy Council outright ask the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, ‘is it true that you said the King's Highness did cast a fantasy to Catherine Howard the first time he saw her?’ And they don't tell her it's wrong, they just want to know who told her. So who is the mole in the privy chamber? Or the council who told her that? Because the Duchess wasn't at court when it happened.

So the Howards get her to court, they would have to have been insane and they have many faults, but, but, but outright idiocy is not one of them to have prepared her as a rival to Anne of Cleves, before Anne arrived. There was no indicator, you know, there was no indicator that Anne's marriage was going to be a comically short disaster.

They would have been setting Catherine up to be a rival to Anne, that Anne might have been able to to outshine and replace in the king's affection and Henry's mistresses don't do well. They don't last long. They are sort of sent off to rot into irrelevance in some provincial backwater is usually what happens. I mean, even Bessy Blount, who produces the Duke of Richmond, is sort of, you know, ‘thanks for playing, but don't call us, we'll call you’. [Tracy Laughs]. And, and so I don't think the Howards' are ***plotting***, but when the king is struck by her beauty and then the royal marriage gets into trouble, I think they do give her advice. ‘This is how you talk to him. This is what you do’. So the metaphor I would use for this is the Howards see the hand they've been dealt and they play it very well, but they didn't ***stack the deck***. That's the closest I could get to an answer for it.

### Tracy Borman [00:37:28]

That's a brilliant way of putting it. And how is all this through Catherine's eyes. What what do you think she's feeling? You know, she knows the king is attracted to her. She can't have been attracted to him, surely?

**Gareth Russell** [00:37:39]

No, I mean, ***no,*** I think he's still not quite at the stage... I think the real physical collapse happens ***after*** her. But he's certainly, he's much older than her although again at that time that is not unheard of in the aristocracy so maybe it wouldn't have been as jarring to her as it would be to us.

I think, again, Hampton Court looming again, I think the moment she starts to realise who he really is months after the marriage, when they're here and he gets sick and nearly dies and the whole place is shut down with this malarial infection. He won't see her. She really seems mentally to struggle with this and is listening to rumours that Anne of Cleves is coming back. She's going to be dismissed, and I think that's when she realises how fragile his health is and how erratic his temper can be. I think initially, (this is just subjective on my part), but I think, you know, there's that fantastic dynastic portrait here. Maybe that's the man she saw, the gold in the silks and ‘God's anointed’. I think she certainly does not exhibit any signs of distress or panic, whether that's her masking up it through manners, we don't know. But she negotiates a difficult position. I mean, she had only been at court for ***six months*** when she becomes queen. No one else had done that. And she negotiates and navigates a very tricky path full of etiquette landmines and, and the fact that she's not very popular because Anne of Cleves is, she negotiates and navigates that expertly so what she felt privately, I think, shifts and changes over the course of the marriage, because it gets off after that scare here that she reaches out to Thomas Culpeper for the first time.

So that's when I think the real behaviour changes. But I think this is just from the confidence she showed, and it has to be an extreme confidence, she seems to have taken to being queen quite quickly and quite well.

### Tracy Borman [00:39:45]

And she could be accused of being duplicitous because Henry thinks she's a virgin. She is his ‘rose without a thorn’. I don't know if he ever said that, but that's the kind of a general idea. But she's concealing a past.

### Gareth Russell [00:40:02]

Totally. She is concealing her past. And I think there are three people, four people really in the family who know it. But there are two that really matter. The one is, is the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, who knows about this liaison with Francis Dereham and the other is her aunt, the fantastic Countess of Bridgewater, who is just that beautiful, sweet spot of unhinged glamour that the Howard's specialise in. [Tracy laughs] and they both know about this and I... you get this impression that they are ***treading water*** for her from the get-go.

And so Francis...this is again another, not regret from ‘*Young and Damned and Fair’*, and I think I was right to take these three pages out. I'm working on a podcast episode about it, which is: I have a theory and I know it goes against the Goldwater Standard, which is why I took it out of the book. I have a theory that Francis Dereham ticks all the boxes of narcissism: So the relationship starts with love bombing and gifts and then ‘I love you so much, please don't leave me’ and then when she leaves him and goes to court, he accuses her of loving someone else. He then runs off to Ireland. He sends her more gifts. There's a lot of manipulation there after that first flush of love and Francis is the problem, they are really concerned. Manox, who we talked about earlier, isn't a problem because they didn't consummate it. It's known by several mutual friends that Catherine and Francis were in a fairly, you know, at least if the maths is right, nine months long sexual relationship and that there was talk in front of people of them getting married.

Francis trundles off to Ireland, where he's accused of piracy but what I think happens is, she marries Henry at the end of July, the proclamation is made here at Hampton Court in August. It's, and actually not too far time wise from where we are, in October 1540, along these kinds of corridors I think the Duchess of Norfolk and the Countess of Bridgewater, there's a cold sweat against their linen undergarments because Francis is back and they're trying to buy time.

And so what you do with someone who has the emotional stability of a toddler, which is Francis Dereham, you give him little treats and rewards and hope it shuts him up for long enough and so they bring him here on All Hallows, and they basically tell Catherine, be nice to him, say hello, we'll bring them to the queen's apartments, and we'll tell him ***at some point*** there will be a job for him (wink wink, nudge nudge) there never will be. And they also negotiate this deal with Francis whereby he has all of these, I imagine, quite insufferable love poems he's written about Catherine and the Duchess of Norfolk says, give them to me as a guarantee of this deal we've made.

So he gives her the ballads, she puts them in her chest, locks it, but he gets the key. So they both have this ammunition against each other. They don't give him a position. There's this long-standing legend that he becomes her secretary and that just isn't true. So I went deep-diving [Tracy chuckles] into who her secretaries were. And she has one the whole way through. She does a little bit of secretarial work, but he actually ends up eventually being a gentleman usher who does the announcing at the doors but it's not until the August after her marriage, so he's actually only in the household for two months, and it's a tribute to Francis that he manages to destroy everyone's life in eight weeks.

And basically this deal breaks down between him and the Duchess, and he gets impatient and at this point, Catherine's touring the north of England with her husband. Francis rides up from London to Pontefract, where they are, and demands the place and the household that's been promised to him, and she gives it to him.

And one thing I always try to stress, both to myself and to readers is: remember how long it took to travel? How many miles, days did it take him to get up to Pontefract? And how and therefore how much time did he have to think ‘this is a terrible idea, turn around’. He didn't do it! He kept going, and this idea, that kind of narcissistic rage, this possessiveness, pushes him forward.

He gets to Pontefract, she really has no choice at this point, but to appoint him but you start to see the panic. She's giving him £3 here, £10 there and saying, take care what words you speak, he's starting to say things, make insinuations. There's other people in the household.

So yes, she is being duplicitous. Absolutely. So was her grandmother and so was her aunt. And they don't come up with a brilliant plan. But what brilliant plan can you come up with when you're in a room filling with water? [Tracy Agrees]. That's the way I would describe it.

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### Tracy Borman [00:44:29]

Gosh. So even now that the sort of vultures are circling or, well, your metaphor was better, there's a sense of time running out, really. This kind of unexploded bomb who is Frances Dereham.

### Gareth Russell [00:44:42]

Such a bomb! [Gareth laughs].

### Tracy Borman [00:44:45]

And a toddler.

[Gareth Laughs].

I love that. But there is another ‘wrongun’ in the mix.

### Gareth Russell [00:44:51]

There is another wrongun.

### Tracy Borman [00:44:51]

Of course, Thomas Culpeper.

### Gareth Russell [00:44:53]

Yes.

### Tracy Borman [00:44:54]

Now tell me about him.

### Gareth Russell [00:44:56]

Three for three.

### Tracy Borman [00:44:58]

She knows how to pick 'em.

### Gareth Russell [00:44:59]

Look... you know what? I love Catherine, but, you know, I feel like sometimes I was staring at the page and trying to talk to a friend, ‘oh, my God. What? What do you see in this? Not again!’. And ‘we talked about this with Francis!’.

So, he's not dissimilar to Francis, although actually he cares less. So Culpeper is a real womaniser, you know, he sort of whittled his bedpost down to a toothpick with so many notches on it. And he had worked for the Lyles over in Calais, and he has a habit of at least flirting with his master's wives, that he quite regrettably, does not grow out of.

But Catherine and Culpeper had a little romance when she first arrived at court, and he is very clear in the sources: ‘I wanted to have sex and you didn't’ so I he went on and started an affair with another member of the court called Bess Harvey and what I find so interesting, and this is part of the sort of the joy of just talking about it, because you can't speculate that much on the page.

But, Catherine ***cries*** when he leaves and goes to Bess Harvey, and you get an impression of her: ‘this is someone who's not particularly cheery’. And sometimes I think people who are very confident in themselves, as Catherine was, sometimes they're a magnet to people like Culpeper, and they become the weak link in that armour. They’re the ones that kind of play games with them and I think that's what he did. And he's very open about that when she becomes queen there at this point back at Greenwich, and she gives him a hat shortly after Henry's brush with death, and he says, well, ‘why weren't you this friendly when you were unmarried?’ he says, ‘why did you not do this when you were a maid?’ And she says, ‘well, that's the thanks I get for the cap, you shall have no more’. But he does. They fall into this relationship over the tour of the North, where they're meeting in these, well, sometimes in the lavatory, which doesn't exactly suggest the best of intentions, but also in, back stairs and she's sending her new favourite Lady Rochford, to find places to meet.

Culpeper seems to be a very handsome guy. I found the itineraries for his house that he had in Greenwich, and it's sort of ten rooms, but he clearly was never there because it's a moth-eaten carpet and a chapel he never uses. He was not a praying man, Thomas Culpeper, [Tracy laughs] but he's still sleeping with this girl, Bess Harvey, up until about the summer of when his relationship with, by then, Queen Catherine, rekindles.

So I would say...I understand the debate, ‘did they? didn't they?’ And it's a much harder one than Anne Boleyn’s to answer. I don't know. It's a phrase I never thought I would hear myself say, but I ***believe*** Thomas Culpeper when he said, because it's either the kind of recklessness that comes from truth, or a depth of stupidity that's almost unimaginable: when he's interrogated by the Council, he says, ‘we hadn't, but we would have had it been going on longer’ and at that point, Edward Seymour says, ‘well, that's already too much’.

Catherine, we put such emphasis on Anne Boleyn's, you know, last denial and confession on the sacrament that she didn't do it. Catherine did the same. She was very clear: ‘I did not pollute the monarch's bed’, is how she puts it. So I think they would have gotten around to it. But it was rumbled. And the reason it's rumbled is not Thomas Culpeper. It's our old toddler bomb, Francis. [Gareth laughs].

### Tracy Borman [00:48:20]

So he is the crucial player in all of this. Well, quite uniquely, to Catherine's story, we have a rather incriminating letter, don't we, that she has written to Culpeper: ‘Yours, as long as life endures’, or words to that effect, now in the National Archives.

### Gareth Russell [00:48:43]

Yes.

### Tracy Borman [00:48:43]

And that can be read a number of ways. Firstly, can you just tell us about that letter?

### Gareth Russell [00:48:47]

Yes. The letter. There's various points at which it could have been written. It probably was written, I think, during the tour of the North. He's unwell when the king's party detaches from the main party of the tour and goes to Hull for a few days and that, I think, is when the letter’s written.

Other people think it's a bit earlier, I think it indicates the relationship is quite far advanced. The language is very intimate. There's also a lot of discussion in the letter about servants that they are using to pass the letters between them – Morris and Webb, her pages - and I would place it to the summer of 1541 when they're, when they're touring the north of England. So it's interesting because I think (it's a slightly long road to get there) this debate over language is a little ***bit*** like the debate over alleged homosexuals in history. What happens is these very flowery, affectionate terms ***can be used*** in platonic settings. So, for instance, when Lord Henry Percy, who's famously linked to Anne Boleyn, refers to his ward, his fellow ward, his chum here at Hampton Court, Thomas Arundell as ‘my goodly bedfellow’, that doesn't necessarily indicate a homosexual or romantic entanglement or intimacy. The fact that Henry Percy keeps referring to Thomas Arundell, however, as ‘my goodly bedfellow’ 15 years after they shared that bed, raises more questions. [Tracy agrees].

So this this language is fluid and you have to look at context. So yes, if you look at, say, Anne Boleyn's letters. Anne Boleyn writes like a sort of 20th century socialite hostess, everything's wonderful. She's never been so delighted to see anyone. ‘Thank you so much, as long as life endures, I'll ***die*** if I don't see you for brunch’, that's the tone of Anne Boleyn's letters. [Tracy laughs].

So when Catherine Howard says, ‘yours as long as life endures’ it could be platonic. The problem is, it's signed, ‘Catherine’, not Catherine the Queen. There's none of the vocabulary apparatus of monarchy around her, it's signed in a private capacity. ‘Yours as long as life endures, Catherine’.

### Tracy Borman [00:51:03]

So it's the ***name*** that gives it away.

**Gareth Russell** [00:51:06]

It's the ***name***. And also the fact that she's saying things like, ‘my man will wait for your reply’. What queen does that? [Tracy agrees]. This is a ***love*** letter, and it's not credible, I think, that it's a letter that speaks to blackmail. You have to kind of ***ignore*** all the words for it to be that, I hope we are not being rude about other people's theories, I don't believe that that's what this is. I think sometimes if it walks and quacks like a duck, it's a duck. And if it looks and sounds like a love letter and it's signed off saying ‘yours as long as life endures, Catherine’, that's what she means.

So yes, the missing two words, ‘the Queen’, would give it away. It's very unusual. I can't think of any of the other wives that did that. They always signed it, ‘KP’ obviously, or ‘Katherine Parr’ as well, or ‘Anne the Queen’. It's unusual for it just to be ‘Catherine’. And then also the details of how to pass the messages between them. So she sends this letter and somewhere in this wonderful cavernous place that it was found. So shortly, shortly after the ***maybe*** dash, when the scandal breaks, Catherine does something that is one of those moments that you want to reach into the page and just put your hand over the person or grab the person or put the hand over them and say, ‘don't, whatever you're about to say... not that!’ And it's the same, Kate William said once that she wished she could go back to Mary, Queen of Scots before she got in the fishing boat and said, ‘Don't, Your Majesty, do not put your foot in that boat, stay in Scotland!’.

Catherine is beginning to panic about all the information that's coming out about her alleged intimacy with Franci and people (this is one of the things that people have said, ‘oh, she was so stupid’) everyone's a bit stupid when they're terrified. You know, no one's sensible on a rollercoaster [Tracy laughs] and she tries to throw Archbishop Cranmer off the scent when she says, ‘you know, Francis was always’, I'm paraphrasing, Francis ‘is always unhinged with jealousy, you know, he was even jealous about me and Thomas Culpeper and why would he be jealous about him?’

And the Archbishop thinks, ‘why on earth would she mention Thomas Culpeper unless there's something there?’ So, by trying to sort of throw the archbishop off the scent, she actually shines a spotlight on Thomas Culpeper, and a search of his rooms is ordered, and they find the letter here, and it ends up in the National Archives.

It's sort of the smoking gun. A lot of servants’ testimonies are more damning. It is where I can understand people being a bit suspicious about Culpeper: Why on earth did he keep it? [Tracy Agrees]. Why did he keep it? I have this, now this is my sort of ***floating off the page*** theory, but I have an instinct, I could be totally wrong, but that's that's the beauty of a spoken podcast over writing it down is.

I think Catherine was planning to do what Adeliza of Louvain did with Henry I: I think when, you know, beautiful Adeliza, who apparently the Howards were descended from her and she was always like, top of every family tree. Henry I’s widow married a courtier, one of his attendants, William d'Aubigny. After miserable, old Henry I died, and had a very happy, fabulously wealthy life, and she could have looked at other people like her sister-in-law, the Queen of France, who'd done the same with the Duke of Suffolk, or, in a less happy example, her sister in law, the Queen of Scots. But she, I think it's interesting with, after that brush with death in 1541 with Henry, she starts reaching out to Culpeper. And I wonder, did Culpeper keep that letter so if she became a very wealthy dowager queen, he sort of had proof they had been involved. [Tracy agrees].

I cannot stress enough to every and all listener, that is maybe me putting two and two together and getting 38. But I do think that there's ***enough*** evidence to suggest, bear in mind, we know he dies in 1547. [Tracy agrees]. She has two brothers in his privy chamber. She has a friend in the privy chamber. They have seen that he came within a hair's breadth of dying in 1541. So ***maybe*** she's going to be the second coming of Queen Adeliza and have a wealthy life as dowager queen and get to pick her own husband the next time.

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### Tracy Borman [00:55:08]

I totally buy into this theory, and not least because Jane Rochford, Jane Boleyn, you know, the great conundrum in all of this is she's an attendant to Catherine, and she facilitates this relationship with Culpeper. Now, Jane is a woman who knows how the court operates. She served pretty much all the Tudor queens so why on earth would she take that risk ***unless***, she, like Catherine, thought, Henry's not long for this world.

### Gareth Russell [00:55:36]

I love that theory.

### Tracy Borman [00:55:37]

It's all making sense. But, let me get back to Catherine. So, can you talk us through her downfall, her arrest? Because it takes place right here at Hampton Court. So Henry is at prayer in the chapel, just a few feet from where we're standing.

### Gareth Russell [00:55:55]

Yes, it's a bit chilling to me, and sort of as we're putting all those pieces together, I sort of thought that it is a bit like Poirot at the end of a mystery, but you are standing in the room where it happened, essentially.

What I tried to say with Catherine's downfall is from many of the books I've done and read, and looked at about many parts of history, the most terrifying lesson is that unquantifiable luck can just end a life, end an empire, end a civilisation. The power of bad luck should never be underestimated, and she has one domino after another.

So, one of the evangelicals who does not leave and go to Switzerland, unfortunately for Catherine, is a man called John Lascelles, who actually is later burned for heresy. And Lascelles' sister had worked in the nursery of the Duchess of Norfolk, so she looked after one of Catherine's cousins, but she was friends with Henry Manox and Lascelles visited his sister, and initially Lascelles wanted her to have ***nothing*** to do with Catherine's household because he was big Cromwellian man, and he was very afraid that Catherine was going to be the smiling face of the Counter-Reformation, and that they were going to see Catholicism rolled back in under her watch and that hadn't happened.

So, he then thinks, well, maybe there's no problem with my sister getting our foot in the door at court by becoming a servant to the queen, and he asks her why she hasn't applied, given that she'd worked for the family before and his sister, who by this point married and living in Sussex, says essentially, ‘I wouldn't work for someone with her morals’ and she ***tells*** him about Manox and then she tells him about Dereham. And Lascelles, now... the treason laws are tight, if you know a secret and you don't pass it on, you're guilty of misprision, you're guilty by association, quite literally. But, I do wonder, would he have run to the Archbishop of Canterbury had it been a Protestant and the reformist queen he was talking about. He goes to Archbishop Cranmer and says, ‘this is what I've been told’. It's sort of, like, pass the parcel. You've got it, you need to get rid of it. Cranmer is terrified of telling Henry in person because Cranmer is not stupid, and he writes a letter and leaves it in the room just off this gallery for Henry to find at mass, telling him all about what these accusations are and Henry initially says he doesn't believe it, but he does order an investigation, and they split the council into two parts.

What's really astonishing in the sources, if you, as I did, probably spend too much time (I sort of went slightly mad looking at them), but they split it very thoroughly. It's an extraordinarily well run –chillingly well-run investigation, and they send one side of councillors after one set of witnesses and another after another set of witnesses, and they're ***not allowed*** to cross contaminate the testimony. So, none of them can know what the other one's saying.

The difference with Anne is, Anne Boleyn, excuse me, they just want her dead and they don't care. I mean, you know, if she hiccups near someone, they'll say it's a sexual calling card. Anything that they can get against Anne Boleyn. With Catherine, it's an actual investigation, and that's not to say that their conclusions, their conclusions were not illogical. They were, I would say, I would say these men were frightened as well (not that his concerts are exactly the cosiest bunch, but you know that better than I do) and, and so they get this, I mean, absolute avalanche of anecdotal evidence from the servants who'd worked for the Duchess and the thing that ***really*** strikes them as suspicious is Francis Dereham, because they recognise the name. ‘Oh, is that not the new gentleman that she's appointed?’ And he's at Hampton Court, he's already made himself noticed through his truly noxious personality. I mean, really, he was all the charm of a wart.

So they are suspicious about this, and they think ‘if they were involved, why has she appointed him? Unless she's planning to resume this intimacy?’ They take Francis in for questioning. They arrest him here on the 3rd of November, the day after –that's how quickly they managed to realise that something's off here. But they're very careful about letting Catherine know. So they arrest him for piracy in Ireland and take him away and initially, that's what everyone thinks it is. It's only a few days later that they have enough evidence. What's crucial is they don't torture him until later, which is in some way horrific and he doesn't contradict the testimony either times, even when he's tortured, and he states very clearly that there ***was*** a relationship, they had planned to marry, but he didn't want the king to die (because that's what they're trying to get them on); ‘You wanted the king to die so you could marry her’. [Tracy agrees].

They come back with the evidence to Catherine, and I do believe she thinks she was telling the truth –other people who've read the book don't and that's part of the right of everyone to interpret this evidence. I think she was telling the ***truth*** when she said, we were joking about marriage. It was not a proper promise. Francis claims it was and probably in his delusional mind, it was. She that’s when I think she makes the dash and she then tries to throw them off the scent of Culpeper and it all swirls together, and to give the fabulous aunt credit, she refuses to save herself by incriminating Catherine.

I say in the book, ‘she looks down the barrel of a gun and shrugs’, and she sort of dares them to do their worst, the councillors. The Duchess of Norfolk pretends to be so sick she can't travel by river and could possibly come back tomorrow and she plays a wonderfully delaying game, but they both end up in prison for life, stripped of their possessions.

So they're later pardoned but the family is facing complete ruin. Thomas and Francis stand trial. Culpeper clings to this testimony that they hadn't slept together. Francis clings to the testimony, even though he's been tortured, that he he didn't want the king to die. They're both condemned and found guilty and sent to Tyburn to be executed. A lot of people wonder ‘why is Culpeper given the honour of the beheading, and it's Francis who's hanged, castrated, cut into quarters?’ and I think it's, maybe, Francis and Henry are the meeting of two narcissists.

And I think this idea that Francis had, quote unquote, spoiled Henry's bride, really, I mean, Henry is so much more preoccupied with Francis than Culpeper. And I mean, the French ambassador makes a fantastically bitchy comment where, you know, servants used to share their master's bed, and he says, ‘oh, you know, Mr Culpeper shared the King's bed and then had a fancy to share the Queen's’. But we don't, what we don't know, as I said, we don't know. But Catherine's held over it (because as a queen there has to be acts of Parliament to go through) and she and Lady Rochford are executed in February.

So it's a four month series of, a very thorough investigation that eventually actually concludes that she, they hedge their bets and they don't say she committed adultery. They say she planned to do it and that's bad enough. She planned to corrupt the succession. And Henry VIII's treason laws were tight enough that that works.

So it's just an avalanche of really terrible luck. But the most important point is that they had to, they had to put pressure on Parliament to get it done. The House of Lords starts to get squeamish about this and says, ‘you know, we're not sure that what she did actually is death penalty worthy’. And that is when Henry directly intervenes to get it done. You know, he manages to force Parliament to petition him to execute her, and I always say when people, you know, feel very sorry for how heartbroken Henry was and he was crying; He did take time away from dabbing his tears to sign the death warrant.

And it was not, or to at least affix the seal. He allowed it to happen and there is a sense of him feeling the most incandescent rage at her. I mean, there's a point here where he says he'd like to torture her to death himself, and so he really just is swallowed by humiliation and fury, and like many people with a big but fragile ego, there's often collateral damage to that. I think, I think she in the end, dies for something that even her most censorious peers were not convinced merited under contemporary law, the death penalty. And that's what, to me, is the great tragedy of her life.

### Tracy Borman [01:04:18]

It ***is*** a tragedy, regardless of what had gone before. And as you say, just an avalanche of bad luck. Well, now there is a scene, often described of Catherine the night before, I think, her execution, calling for the block so that she can practice and that always breaks my heart every time I read that. Because it reminds us how young she is. Not yet 20, really.

### Gareth Russell [01:04:43]

No, not 20, definitely not 21. I would say not 20 yet. I think she was 19 when she died. But also, that's a young woman with a good grasp of etiquette and the public performance and rehearsal is key. And I think at the very end, you see, I think, yes, something heart-breaking and touching and private and vulnerable, but I also see a good bit of pride, self-possession and dignity to think ‘I am not going to go out like the Countess of Salisbury or Thomas Cromwell’. This is going to be a clean job and I am going, if this is the last, what is that line, I think it is *‘The Lion in Winter’,* but it might not be, in which case, that's a shame because that's my favourite play. It is a *‘The Lion in Winter’*: ‘if all that's left to do is fall, it matters much how you do it’.

### Tracy Borman [01:05:31]

That's a great line.

### Gareth Russell [01:05:32]

Yeah, and I think I messed it up, but it's close enough and I think, [Gareth chuckles] she, ‘if all that's left to do is die, you have to do it well’ and she did, she rehearsed. She practiced with the block and that's one of those cobwebs of myth that was put back and it is true.

### Tracy Borman [01:05:48]

And it is true. And I'd never thought of it in those terms, that this is all about her sticking to etiquette and respecting that and wanting to do the thing properly. She's resigned to it. So she will die well.

### Gareth Russell [01:05:59]

Yes, it takes, it takes a, it takes steel in your blood to do that, I think.

### Tracy Borman [01:06:06]

Well, I think of ***all*** the six queens, I think it's almost the greatest challenge to strip away the narratives about Catherine Howard and get to the ***true*** woman. There's the modern-day narrative. She's been portrayed as preyed upon as a victim. There's the Victorian narrative of the pretty airhead seductress. [Gareth agrees]. But could you just sum up for us: Who was the real Catherine?

### Gareth Russell [01:06:34]

Oh, it's a tough one. Well, I think. I think part of the difficulty of defining her is the brevity of her life. It's a bit like trying to separate the Tsar's daughters sometimes, they seem like frozen forever in those four white dresses, and youth brings with it a transience and a tragedy of its own and sometimes personality traits are still developing.

This line in ‘*Brideshead Revisited’* I love about Julia Flyte that I always quote with Catherine and I wrote it when I finished the book it's about a little kingfisher darting across from flower to flower and enjoying the evening, but ‘like a child in a fairy tale, there is beneath the surface a fabulous monster that her command will belch forth everything and consume her too’. So I think that to me is Catherine, I think there was a woman of tremendous fun, vivacity, presence and charisma. I think she had the substance to become someone of substance.

As the years passed I think she made mistakes, incredibly silly mistakes. All I can say is that at 19 and in love, I made very silly mistakes. I had terrible taste too. I hope no one's listening. [Tracy Laughs]. And I think that Catherine had that there was that there was the fragility, the frivolity, the the passage of stupidity that we all get to go through. It's just that we're not married to someone who thinks that's worth the death penalty.

So really, I see someone full of life who was a little bit too close to someone who was increasingly full of death.

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

Gareth. What a way to end that is the line to end all lines. I'm pretty much speechless now. The way that you have summed Catherine up, it feels like you've got to her ***core*** and restored her, kind of rescued her from all these unhelpful narratives. And now I certainly see Catherine Howard as I think she really was. I hope our listeners can. You have conjured up such a vivid image right here in the place where it ***all*** happened.

Gareth, thank you so much for joining me.

### Gareth Russell [01:08:42]

Thank you so much for having me.

[The theme music starts again – it is measured and stately, then becomes more relaxed.]

### Sarah Gristwood [01:08:46]

[Sarah Gristwood speaks over the top. She has a Southern English accent and speaks clearly from the studio, without echo.]

Thank you for listening to this episode. I'm Sarah Gristwood, and in the next episode I'll be talking to Tracy about Katherine Parr.

### Tracy Borman [01:08:57]

[Tracy speaks from the studio, no longer in The Haunted Gallery.]

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 out.]

[End of Episode.]