# **Historic Royal Palaces Podcast**

# **The Six Tudor Queens:**

# **Catherine Parr with Sarah Gristwood**

**Show Notes**

Catherine Parr is the final Tudor Queen in our series. Was she the nursemaid who looked after and survived her husband, or was she much more than that?

In this final episode of our Six Queens Series, Tracy Borman and historian Sarah Gristwood acquaint us with the woman behind the myths, an intelligent, strong and resourceful champion of her own agenda.

This episode also concludes the series with a reflection on the legacy of the Six Tudor Queens.

[View and learn more about the painting of the Family of Henry VIII.](https://www.rct.uk/collection/themes/exhibitions/painting-paradise/the-queens-gallery-buckingham-palace/the-family-of-henry-viii)

[Explore the Haunted Gallery where the painting is kept.](https://www.google.com/maps/@51.4036169,-0.337082,2a,75y,93.52h,94.19t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sZaJgI28yRfgAAAQsEn4lPA!2e0!7i13312!8i6656?entry=ttu)

## **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 measure 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 Borman [00:01:24]

[After a beat of silence, the sound changes. Tracy is now in a large, echoey space. She speaks animatedly and her voice has a slight echo.]

Well, hello listeners, welcome to – I'm very sad to say! the final episode of this Six Queens series, and I am here at the, at the foot of the Haunted Gallery and, as the name suggests, we've had a number of sightings along here, and it's particularly atmospheric at the moment because the palace has just been closed to the public.

The doors are locked and bolted. We've got it all to ourselves. Evening is starting to gather in, and, yeah, the walls seem to kind of breathe the history as we're standing here.

I am delighted to be joined by historian, author, broadcaster Sarah Gristwood. Sarah, welcome.

**Sarah Gristwood** [00:02:14]

[Sarah Gristwood has a Southern English accent. She speaks slower than Tracy, in an upbeat tone.]

Thank you.

### Tracy Borman [00:02:16]

And of course, we are talking this evening about the last of the six queens, Catherine Parr, who is very closely associated, not just with Hampton Court, but with the space where we're going to be recording this evening. But before we start on on Catherine's story, I'd love to get a reaction from you. I mean, what's it like for you being here out of hours in a space associated with the woman you're going to be discussing?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:02:50]

Oh, it's the out-of-hours that makes all the difference. I hate to say it, since not everyone gets to have it to themselves, but there is something very magical about it. And I think walking through these grand spaces of Hampton Court makes me especially aware of the journey that this Queen, Catherine Parr, went on. Because (although her mother was a courtier, she wasn't born into the nobility) So, for her then, her first of all, to be around these circles as a complete outsider, you know, or as someone really ***not*** remotely high up in the pecking order and then to be walking these spaces as queen, it makes –and it must have made her, realise just how far she'd come.

### Tracy Borman [00:03:42]

Absolutely. And we don't tend to think about that enough because we see the finished product, Catherine as Queen, not the journey.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:03:50]

Yes, exactly that. And I mean, I think also, I think that feeling how far she'd risen and thinking of some of Henry's other queens must have made her also, a sensible woman though she was, quite frighteningly aware of just how far she could fall.

### Tracy Borman [00:04:11]

She had a lot of examples to give us of what could go horribly wrong. [Sarah laughs and agrees]. So, the stakes were high. Well, let's, let's just walk along to where we're going to be chatting about Catherine Parr. But before we go into The Holy Day Closet, as it's called, just above, the beautiful Chapel Royal there, I'd like to just pause and look at this ***glorious*** painting. ‘*The Family of Henry VIII.*’

Really, this is Henry celebrating his dynasty, you know, pointing to the future.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:04:46]

Absolutely.

### Tracy Borman [00:04:48]

And it was painted quite early in his marriage to Catherine Parr. And yet!

### Sarah Gristwood [00:04:51]

And yet!

[Sarah Laughs].

### Tracy Borman [00:04:52]

Yes. Can you point out the obvious mistake?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:04:55]

Yes, that she is nowhere to be seen. Henry is there with his children and with a queen. But that queen is Jane Seymour. Long dead, of course, but the mother of his son and again, I think that's probably one of the kind of ***pragmatic deals*** that Catherine Parr had to make with her new position.

### Tracy Borman [00:05:19]

So, do you think she saw this in a sort of pragmatic way? Not a, ‘huh, hang on, I'm queen. [Tracy and Sarah Laugh]. Why aren’t I in the painting?’

### Sarah Gristwood [00:05:28]

I think she was probably enough of a realist to accept the painting. I think she absolutely had her own ***passions*** and her own ***passionate reasons*** for marrying Henry but I don't think they’d have been triggered by this painting to a huge degree.

### Tracy Borman [00:05:47]

Yeah, a sensible woman. She knew when to… well, she could choose her battles, I guess.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:05:52]

Exactly that and of course, the real battle for her, the passionate one, ***was*** religion.

### Tracy Borman [00:05:58]

[Tracy and Sarah enter the Holy Day Closet, notable for its high ceiling. Their voices become echoed.]

Yes, absolutely. Well, on that note, let's continue on into the Holy Day Closet. You can hear my voice echoing now.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:06:07]

Oh goodness, yes!

### Tracy Borman [00:06:09]

It's quite a subdued space, isn't it?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:06:11]

Isn't it just!

### Tracy Borman [00:06:11]

How does it feel to be here? Can you describe the space a little bit for us?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:06:16]

It's a very enclosed space. I think it's a shock to us now, often just ***how small*** were the rooms in which the Tudor grandees of the highest level still lived. And that must have increased the sort of terrifying sense of ***claustrophobia*** in palace affairs.

### Tracy Borman [00:06:37]

Yes, absolutely. We tend to think of these huge state rooms, the Great Hall, but actually most of the business was done in rooms like this. [Sarah agrees].

**Sarah Gristwood** [00:06:44]

Exactly. And I guess it would have been in a room just like this where Henry and Catherine actually married.

### Tracy Borman [00:06:51]

Yes. And that's the interesting thing for this much married monarch. The actual weddings were quite low key, weren’t they!

### Sarah Gristwood [00:06:58]

I know, I know, it was an oratory, wasn't it? [Tracy agrees]. With very few witnesses.

### Tracy Borman [00:07:03]

Yes, so, we commemorate that event here as it's picked out in gold lettering there on the wall. ‘Henry VIII and Catherine Parr married in her privy closet at Hampton Court on the morning of the 12th of July 1543’. So that's not here, it no longer exists, sadly, thanks to the various building works and demolition works at the palace over the years ***but*** it would have been close to here and a space very much like this.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:07:29]

Indeed, yes.

### Tracy Borman [00:07:30]

So, it is a great place to be exploring Catherine's story.

And I'd like to begin really with some myth busting, if you will, [Sarah laughs] because so many times I hear Catherine Parr described as the nursemaid, she's the one who basically looks after Henry in his old age, and she's a sort of fairly meek and mild character, just very patient, looking after her ailing husband. Can we shut it down straightaway?

[Sarah Laughs].

### Sarah Gristwood [00:08:00]

Definitely. I think that myth can be bust on several different counts, and only one of them is Catherine's own character, because, of course, the ***other*** thing is that wasn't how Tudor Court worked.

We ***today*** might think of a wife as being the obvious person to look after, you know, an ageing husband's closest bodily needs but at the time, ***no,*** it would have been the young men around Henry the, you know, the queen’s side, the king's side. If the king wanted, you know, really intimate bodily functions help – help with anything like that; doctors and so on it was men. [Tracy agrees].

So, this idea of her nursing him doesn't really stack up. The idea of her being meek and mild and, you know, just the person to lead the ageing king gently down the path towards death, that could ***hardly*** be further from the truth. I mean, Catherine Parr was, she proved time and again, a remarkably strong and resourceful woman, but she was also one with her own agenda. She wrote later how, at first, you know, her own will was wholly set not on marrying King Henry, but on marrying ***another*** man. I mean, she'd been married twice before, both times effectively, you know, marriage for convenience, as it were. Now, she wanted to marry for love and Henry VIII was ***not*** the man she loved.

But she wrote that God, you know, in God in his grace, in whom she utterly, you know, believed with all the fervour of her heart, had persuaded her, had shown her how to put her own will aside, and do what she believed to be His. Because Catherine Parr had, at some point in her life, become converted to the reformed faith, and she could lead Henry in what she believed was the right way.

### Tracy Borman [00:10:11]

So, Catherine saw this is her calling. God had given her this opportunity and even though, as you say, she would have married elsewhere if it had been for personal reasons, she couldn't turn this down, this ***chance*** to further the reformed faith.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:10:26]

No, that's right. We don't know exactly when Catherine Parr converted. It may have been a sort of slow, steady path because, of course, her mother had been one of Catherine of Aragon’s ladies, you know, so obviously that would have been Catherine Parr's upbringing.

But it becomes clear that, you know, increasingly, she wrote about how once you know, she'd ***loved,*** she'd adored worldly things (and heaven knows records of her wardrobe as queen bear that out) but that she learned to look in a different way. I think she was a woman on a mission.

### Tracy Borman [00:11:06]

Clearly. And religion, I think we can't overemphasise just how pivotal that was to Catherine in this is not just lip service, is it?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:11:16]

No, absolutely not. And of course, these were the ***pivotal*** years for the new religion, when in a sense, I mean, we think of the Reformation as being the break with Rome but of course, it had started with a lot of the great ladies of Europe as literally a way of ***reforming*** what they saw as the ***abuses*** in the Catholic Church. But then it changed into something else and these were very much the years when that was happening.

### Tracy Borman [00:11:44]

It's fascinating just to think of Catherine in this sort of melting pot of different ideas. It was still quite risky. Some of the things she was believing in.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:11:54]

Totally.

### Tracy Borman [00:11:55]

And we'll go on to that but let's just focus on Catherine herself, because she is different to the five in that there's no idea that she's a virgin bride. As you say, she's been married twice before. [Sarah agrees]. She's much more experienced and more experienced, not just in marriage, but in court life. As you said, her mother had been, had served in the court as...

### Sarah Gristwood [00:12:18]

Yes, ***and yet*** Catherine had spent most of her own life, her adult life, outside court circles. You know, her second husband, Lord Latimer, their castle was in Yorkshire at which Catherine, indeed, you know, had to almost defend against the pilgrimage of grace.

So, it might have been useful that Catherine Parr wasn't at this point when Henry chose her, particularly allied to either of the court factions, if you like. Because, this does seem to have been a marriage, practically the only one of which, everyone approved at the time. ***Everyone*** seemed to do so. They described Catherine as being pleasant and lively in appearance. Her virtue, her good humour –maybe that is slightly where the sort of meek and mild nursemaid legend comes from, but you could also look on it as just saying ‘she was a clever woman, clever enough sometimes to hide her teeth when necessary’.

### Tracy Borman [00:13:23]

Incredibly clever, really. And to be in favour, at least at the beginning, with ***everyone.*** Nobody is opposing this marriage, that's pretty much unheard of with Henry. [Sarah laughs].

What sort of woman would we have encountered if we'd been there, in 1543, witnessing the arrival of this new bride for Henry. Do we know much about Catherine's appearance?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:13:52]

Yes, we know that her religious fervour did not stop her passion for clothes but then again, as queen, you see, she could say it was her duty. So, you know, there's lots of kinds of ***purple*** velvet, wonderful jewellery, and a ***stunning*** number of shoes. [Tracy laughs]. You know, ‘*Sex and The City’,* eat your heart out! And perfumes and sweet oils being made up for her.

### Tracy Borman [00:14:18]

Now, I did hear that she was the sweetest smelling of the wives.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:14:22]

[Sarah laughs]. Really?

### Tracy Borman [00:14:23]

So, yeah, perhaps you're right there. So pleasant, pleasant looking?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:14:27]

Yes, and good company, liked music, liked dancing. And was very quickly seen as being at home entertaining ambassadors and all that kind of thing. And of course, her rise was very quick because, you know, from being a comparatively minor member of the Tudor upper class: very suddenly she was queen. She was absolutely inhabiting the role. And of course, it was only a ***year*** after the marriage that this woman, with no royal background, only less than a year of queenship, was being left as regent of the country.

### Tracy Borman [00:15:07]

Which is extraordinary right here at Hampton Court. And I'd like to dwell on that, because this really was quite an interesting moment in the history of Henry's queens. She was given the full regency, wasn't she? [Sarah agrees]. When Henry went off on one last gasp attempt to glory in France.

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### Sarah Gristwood [00:15:26]

Indeed. I mean, three decades, 30 years earlier, of course, Catherine of Aragon being left as regent and Catherine Parr was named for Catherine of Aragon, the first Catherine was ***godmother*** to the last. But Catherine of Aragon had grown up as the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella – and Isabella is the Warrior Queen. She had much more, she'd even served as her father's ambassador in England. She had much more background in these things than Catherine Parr did. You do wonder where Catherine Parr found that confidence to think, ‘yes, I can do this. It's absolutely not the life anyone would ever have foreseen for me’. but, Catherine the Queen – edicts went out, signed ‘Catherine the Queen’.

### Tracy Borman [00:16:15]

And what an impact that must have had on the younger of her stepdaughters that we see over there. In that case, there is Elizabeth's *‘Book of Common Prayer’*, next to Anne Boleyn's *‘Book of Hours’*. We will take a look in a moment. So that's mother and daughter united in religion. But, Elizabeth was very close to Catherine Parr.

**Sarah Gristwood** [00:16:36]

She was.

**Tracy Borman** [00:16:36]

And we know she was in attendance during Catherine's regency at Hampton Court. So do you think she ***inspired*** the idea of queenship?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:16:46]

Well, I mean, Elizabeth may have had the idea already or might have had it coming from different sources, but I do think that that time being here with Catherine, because Catherine was a good stepmother to Elizabeth, to Mary (almost her own age) and even to little Edward.

I do think that would have shown Elizabeth a woman exercising power. I think Elizabeth probably, you know, really took quite a lot away from that experience and, of course, she and Catherine were studying together, reading religious books together – you know, Elizabeth, showed that in her gifts.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:17:26]

Absolutely. And I think we should give Catherine an awful lot of credit for ***getting on*** with all three of her stepchildren, because they are very different.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:17:34]

Yes, yes. Me too! You wouldn't have believed that she could get on so well with Elizabeth ***and*** with Mary, never mind the little boy. [Tracy agrees.] Because Mary, of course, if, as Catherine began to clearly move further towards reformed faith, you'd have thought that Mary would have ***hated*** her for it and yet they stayed close. I mean, Catherine ***even*** got Mary to collaborate on one of the books that she was involved with, a translation of Erasmus.

### Tracy Borman [00:18:09]

Oh really? I didn't know that!

### Sarah Gristwood [00:18:10]

What I absolutely love is, there's a letter where there's the question of whether Mary’s translation should go out under her own name or anonymously. And Catherine is basically saying, ‘out under your own name, it'll sell much better that way’. I mean, never mind the Queen of England. Give this woman a job in a publisher's publicity office.

[Tracy Laughs].

### Tracy Borman [00:18:34]

Absolutely! I love that fact.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:18:37]

Me too!

### Tracy Borman [00:18:39]

I mean, we tend to hear flattering descriptions of royal women in terms of their learning and their intellect. But Catherine's the real deal, isn't she?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:18:51]

Yes, Catherine's totally the real deal and it's notable (there's been some work done recently) on how, just how the praise came to be couched when she married Henry it was all about her virtue, her kindness, you know, pleasing-ness.

Later, she was being described as, you know, almost a kind of Warrior Queen because she'd been regent for the country – England was at war for a lot of the time that she was queen. Her own writings analysed can even be thought, you know, to be a kind of propaganda writing for Henry.

### Tracy Borman [00:19:33]

That is so interesting.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:19:34]

Yeah, and she has described in a really – almost as if she was his kind of lieutenant general in the ***earlier*** years of the marriage.

### Tracy Borman [00:19:45]

Okay. Now you stressed that.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:19:34]

I did.

### Tracy Borman [00:19:47]

There is a ‘but’ coming here. So, it starts in the best possible way with Catherine and with Henry. They seem like this dream team, don’t they?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:19:57]

Yes, totally.

### Tracy Borman [00:19:58]

But it doesn't continue like that.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:20:01]

No it doesn't. It's weird, isn't it? Only a year after Catherine married and became queen, she was regent of the country. Two years after that – certainly if we believe the accounts of, you know, the John Foxe, the Protestant martyrologist, she was in danger of her life. She was in danger, real danger of having gone the way that two of Henry's queens had gone before, maybe not even to the block, but to the fires that waited for heretics.

### Tracy Borman [00:20:34]

Oh gosh! So even worse, even more horrific. Can you talk us through it?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:20:40]

Sure. I mean, Henry's religious beliefs, as we know it's become, well, ***complicated*** is the polite way of putting it, flip-flopping might be another.

Certainly, in these last years of his reign, he seemed to be moving between being swayed by the conservative faction led by the Bishop Gardiner and Wriothesley, and the reforming faction. It may even be, I’d like to suggest that Catherine's reforming fervour may even have been a, you know, an interest of Henry's at first. But then as he moved further towards, you know, the sort of the conservative revival, Catherine's conservative enemies began to move against her, and they very nearly succeeded.

In Catherine's rooms, there was a lot of study of the new books, ***even*** banned books, you know, books of ***Protestant*** theory and, we've all heard probably of Anne Askew, the female martyr, who was in the tower on the rack, pressed to name great ladies around Catherine, who had supported her, who shared her beliefs. Anne heroically, you know, went to the fires without, without giving any names but, the Queen's chambers were raided for banned books. No one found any because there had been a tip off but that's fairly extraordinary if you think about it. And there was one day, apparently, in that summer of 1546, you know, so nearing, nearing the end of the King's reign, when Catherine had been arguing, debating, let's say, religion with Henry. And Henry said afterwards, ‘well, it's a fine thing when women become clerks, start arguing this way’. And he was actually persuaded to issue a warrant for her arrest.

### Tracy Borman [00:22:50]

Gosh.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:22:51]

Tipped off Catherine, I said she could hide her teeth when need be. She rushed to her husband, tears, on her knees, saying, ‘no, no. She'd only been arguing to try and take his mind off the pain of his sore leg’. You know, the ulcer, the agonising ulcer. And Henry said, so the story goes, said ‘well then, sweetheart, no more than that? We're friends again’.

The next day, when they arrived with the warrant, Henry ***angrily*** told them to go away. Catherine was back by his side. But can you imagine for the ***sixth*** queen who knew what had happened to numbers two and five.

### Tracy Borman [00:23:38]

That was a close shave. Terrifying. But how quick thinking of Catherine. That is brilliant, because it played to Henry’s vanity.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:23:47]

Exactly. And it is that kind of pragmatism, that kind of balancing act that she was capable of.

### Tracy Borman [00:23:54]

Yes.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:23:54]

Which others perhaps hadn't been.

### Tracy Borman [00:23:57]

She was a passionate reformer, but she wasn't necessarily going to die for her faith, which is what would have happened.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:24:02]

Yes it would, yeah.

### Tracy Borman [00:24:03]

With this very, very paranoid king who had already executed two wives. Why not make it a third? Goodness me. So, does Catherine survive?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:24:14]

She does.

### Tracy Borman [00:24:16]

According to the rhyme, of course. And what happens after Henry for Catherine?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:24:24]

Well, it's interesting, isn't it? Because there are two strong elements here.

As we say, Catherine had been regent of the country. There's every reason to guess that Catherine expected and ***hoped*** to be, possibly even ***regent*** for the young Edward, Edward VI ***at least***, surely some sort of major position on the Regency Council. But that's not how it went.

In the last weeks of Henry's life, Catherine wasn't there, basically. Henry and Catherine, they came to London for Christmas, but then Catherine, with Mary, with the ladies, with most of the court, was sent away down to Greenwich to celebrate Christmas there. And Henry was (again, it's that thing) surrounded by his male courtiers and in that time, it was, – if you like, Catherine's side, it was the reforming nobility, the Seymours among them, who gained the ascendancy.

So, Gardiner wasn't on the Regency Council that finally emerged from Henry's will. But neither was Catherine.

### Tracy Borman [00:25:43]

That must have been quite a sting in the tail. She'd been brilliant as regent in 1544, but now a real slap in the face.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:25:52]

Totally and interestingly, there are some letters signed, ‘Catherine the Queen Regent’ and we can't be sure, they're in a file of papers that mostly date from the reign of young Edward, Edward VI. So, did Catherine actually ***believe*** that she would be the Queen Regent? Or were the letters just misplaced, you know, did they date from her earlier regency?

But certainly, I don't see how she cannot have been deeply, bitterly disappointed. Henry's will after that that month where he was surrounded by his men and, you know, basically the women weren't allowed in. Henry's will left her very generously provided for as a widow; You know, £3,000 of plate and jewellery, her dower lands, all the rest of it but it didn't mention her politically ***at all***.

And of course, a widow wasn't in a very good position to make the immediate moves. Those men around Henry, Edward Seymour in particular, moved to keep his death secret for several days while they took control. Meanwhile, Catherine, as a new widow, was supposed to remain in seclusion and above the fray.

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### Tracy Borman [00:27:19]

I mean, ***how*** that must have hurt? Because, as you said at the beginning, you know, Catherine, the reason that she made this personal sacrifice of her own desires to marry Henry is that she had plans and she wanted to take forward her vision for the religion of the country, probably lots of other things besides. But she had been able to do something during the fairly brief marriage [Sarah agrees] but surely the Regency would have been her opportunity.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:27:49]

Yes, indeed. I mean, maybe she took some comfort in the fact that it was the reforming party that would guide the young Edward, but maybe not that much comfort. After all, one of the first things Edward, Seymour's wife did, was to grab the Queen's jewels. Catherine took that remarkably badly.

### Tracy Borman [00:28:09]

Yes and who can blame her? [Sarah laughs].

### Sarah Gristwood [00:28:11]

Indeed.

### Tracy Borman [00:28:12]

Well, I know, Sarah, that you have a rather interesting take on Catherine's marriage to Thomas Seymour. So, husband number four for Catherine, which has always, ***always*** been portrayed (and I have been guilty of this myself) As ‘at last, after three political marriages, Catherine marries for love’. But there might have been another incentive?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:28:33]

Yes. I mean, I'm sure that's true. We've got letters from Henry, you know, sorry, from Catherine to Thomas saying how, you know, she'd always wanted to marry him before any other man. There's no doubt, I don't think, that they were deeply in love or even in lust.

But it's notable also that they were both, both Catherine and Thomas, bitterly disappointed that they hadn't been allowed to exercise, they weren't being allowed more influence over the young king, over Edward. Thomas was furious that his brother Edward was now Lord protector, and he, Thomas, was relegated to a very back seat. Catherine was surely angry and disappointed that she wasn't being encouraged to take any part. ***Who knows?*** together, maybe they could provide a kind of counter influence on Edward. So, I do wonder if there was just an element of that, along with the undoubted feeling.

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

I think that's quite compelling, and it matches what we know of Catherine's character and her ambition. They do marry, but of course, if they had such plans to control Edward, they don't quite work, do they?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:29:59]

No, indeed they don't.

### Tracy Borman [00:30:02]

And could you just tell us what happens next with Catherine and that stepdaughter she'd been so close to, Elizabeth?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:30:11]

Well, Catherine's marriage to Thomas Seymour was very quick. Indeed it was so soon after Henry's death it was ***secret*** but when word came out, there was a lot of disapproval, partly because if Catherine had suddenly then announced she was pregnant, no one could have been 100% sure whether the child was Thomas's or King Henry's.

Catherine's stepdaughter, Mary, was one who then did turn against her, who said that it was very shocking to dishonour her father, Henry's memory that way. But Catherine and Thomas set up household, and into the care came both the young Lady Jane Grey and the young Princess Elizabeth.

### Tracy Borman [00:31:06]

Wow, well, what could possibly go wrong with that scenario?

[Tracy and Sarah laugh].

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### Sarah Gristwood [00:31:08]

Oh, I'm afraid I suspect the answer is that with Thomas Seymour, everything would go wrong. [Tracy laughs] I mean, there is whatever I say and believe about possible political thoughts, there is some reason for thinking Thomas Seymour is just one of those men. [Tracy Agrees]. Irresistibly attractive, but bad news in every conceivable way.

### Tracy Borman [00:31:36]

Yeah. He's trouble.

**Sarah Gristwood** [00:31:37]

Yes, so for a while it all looks happy, you know, through the months of 1547. Then, however, Thomas seems to be having a curious, jocular relationship with his nubile, teenage, quasi-stepdaughter, Elizabeth.

There are tales of, you know, sort of romps, some of which Catherine actually, you know, joined in but Thomas, going into her bedroom before she was up, slapping her on her buttocks. And it was reported that Catherine, who by now was herself pregnant, found in the early months of the next year, found Elizabeth in Thomas's arms.

Now we don't know what was really going on. Probably they didn't know themselves. It was a mixture of feelings. But you can understand why Catherine felt it necessary to just send Elizabeth away.

### Tracy Borman [00:32:42]

So, it couldn't have come to a worse end, this wonderful relationship between stepmother and stepdaughter.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:32:49]

Yeah.

### Tracy Borman [00:32:49]

It ended in scandal.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:32:50]

Yes. Well, yes. The two continued writing to each other in affectionate terms. Had Catherine lived longer then maybe there would have been a, you know, a ***rapprochement***. As I said, I think Catherine was a pragmatic woman and one who, you know, genuinely, deeply cared for her stepchildren. And that summer, indeed, she, Catherine and Thomas appeared to be, you know, back on speaking, joking about how the baby was. They could feel the baby quickening in Catherine's womb and so on.

### Tracy Borman [00:33:23]

So, they'd been reconciled?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:33:25]

Yes, they had. They had.

### Tracy Borman [00:33:28]

And so tell us what happened after that.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:33:31]

Well, Catherine, in due course, Catherine was brought to bed, you know, as summer turned to autumn, of a baby girl. All appeared to go well, but a few days later she died of childbed fever, basically and there are some very distressing reports from those last days about how at one point you, when she was tossing and fever in the last, you know, the last days and hours, her ladies sent for Thomas to try and comfort her. You know, to hold her down, to almost lie on the bed beside her, put his arms around her. But she protested, saying that she knew he meant only ill to her. So, it did go badly, it did come back.

### Tracy Borman [00:34:21]

So, it's a sad end for Catherine really. A life that held so much promise and indeed, so much achievement really. She was a published author and a religious ***firebrand***, and a woman in a position of ***huge*** power. She survived. But quite, quite a tragic end, really.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:34:42]

Yes, it is. It's really not the end you would have hoped. I think that we all ***like*** Catherine Parr. I mean, if you had to be stuck on a desert island with one of Henry's wives, who are you going to choose? Catherine Parr.

We don't want it to have ended this way, but it did. I guess all one can say is that she, well that she fought her fight, she had her choice in the end. She made her choices. She did leave, well, several different legacies maybe. She did leave a legacy of ***writings***. As you say she published two books under her own name, and was closely involved in two more.

And, some of her writings continue right down to the present day. *‘The Book of Common Prayer’* still, I think, has a prayer for the King, which is based on the one that she wrote.

### Tracy Borman [00:35:45]

Oh really?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:35:46]

and I mean her books, the first, the one she wrote in Henry's lifetime, the more moderate ones were, were huge bestsellers. Reprinted more than 20 times?

### Tracy Borman [00:36:00]

Wow. I would kill for that.

[Sarah and Tracy Laugh].

### Sarah Gristwood [00:36:02]

Well, quite, exactly, I know! Wouldn’t we all.

[Sarah and Tracy Laugh].

### Tracy Borman [00:36:05]

So, that's a ***really*** impressive legacy.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:36:11]

Yes. And the last book, the one that she wrote after Henry's death, *‘Lamentations of a Sinner’,* which was much more personal and much more extreme in its kind of evangelical faith, but it was also very ***personal***. So, again, good for Catherine. She left her mark.

### Tracy Borman [00:36:30]

She certainly did. And it is very clear to me that this is a woman you personally admire, as you say, you’d choose her as your desert island companion.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:36:43]

Mind you, think of the alternative.

[Tracy Laughs].

### Tracy Borman [00:36:46]

I don't know, I think I'd take Anne of Cleves kind of please.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:36:48]

Oh, yes. Okay. Yes, I'd settle for that.

[Sarah and Tracy Laugh]

### Tracy Borman [00:36:51]

But what do you think of Catherine overall? If that isn't too big a question, is this a woman who you like? Is it just a sort of, more of a distance you admire her? She's impressive.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:37:09]

No, I think if you read some of Catherine's letters, I think you do wind up liking her as well and that combination of passionate belief. Maybe it's hard today, just to get a feel for the evangelical fervour, but we can all share her passion for clothes and I think just the sort of the ***deals*** that she made, she was clearly, she was a ***good friend***. She had some, you know, close friends. She was a good stepmother.

I think she is a woman one would have liked and certainly does admire and I think one does see her legacy. We've spoken about the writing legacy, but living on in another way also I do think that Queen Elizabeth I took ***a lot***, perhaps from many of Henry's wives, if not all, but I certainly think she took a lot from Catherine.

### Tracy Borman [00:38:09]

That bond between them was undeniable, I think, which in a way, Catherine, is that the perfect queen to end our series with (not just because she literally is the last of the six queens, of Henry VIII) because she was a woman, we might say ahead of her time, might we? This was not a woman's world, was it?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:38:36]

No, I think she ***was*** ahead of her time because we ***admire*** Anne Boleyn, for, as it were, ‘making her own way to the throne’ but Anne came from a family with major titles, you know, the Dukedom of Norfolk and so on in the background – more so than Catherine Parr.

This wasn't a time when women, certainly in England, had been expected to play a huge part in the religious debates, but Catherine did. It wasn't a time when women were expected to put out their own achievements under their own name, but Catherine did. And yet, perhaps today we admire that, too. She wasn't ***solely*** a crusader. She knew how to, you know step back, deal with the card she was handed at the same time.

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

Well, Sarah, one thing we haven't mentioned is the question of whether Catherine was expected to produce another heir. So, Henry, of course, had a son already. By the time he married her, he had two daughters as well, though he'd like to forget them for large parts of the time. But was there the same pressure on Catherine in this respect?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:40:01]

Well, it's a very interesting question. And the fact that the evidence is contradictory maybe says something about the times because it ***was*** in Henry's will, even in the final wills, he wrote just before his death it was said that any children of Henry and Catherine took their place in the succession as though there might be such children.

And at one point, when things began to get edgy between them, the Imperial Ambassador had written that there were ***rumours*** of a new queen, a ***seventh*** queen, because of Catherine's quote ‘infertility’. But, big but, by this point Henry was huge, he was heavily ulcerated, Catherine and her two previous marriages did not have a child. So, one wonders to what degree it was really expected. To what degree they were really having a sexual relationship, and perhaps if they ***weren't***, if it wasn't, perhaps that did set Catherine ***free*** in some way, because 16th century women didn't– aristocratic women especially, didn't much get to control their bodies, if you like. But they, some of them, still wanted to control their spirit, their mind.

In a way, I guess you could say that with Catherine's marriage to Henry, she was less dominated by her biology than any of the others, because, after all, it was the question of fertility of childbearing that had ***wrecked*** Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. It had made Jane Seymour Henry's favourite wife. Catherine somehow seems to have managed to step past that, step above it, if you like. Ironic that in the end it would be death, you know, after childbearing, that killed her or hurt her so early. But nonetheless, in a way, maybe (very unusually for the mid-16th century) she managed to step past her biological duty as they'd have seen it. And ***guess who*** would manage to do the same a few years later? Why, the stepdaughter who had learned from her example.

### Tracy Borman [00:42:38]

The Virgin Queen.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:42:40]

The Virgin Queen.

### Tracy Borman [00:42:41]

That's fascinating. So ultimately, Catherine, I think, was judged more by her mind than by her body, which does set her apart, I think, from the other five. Sarah, given you are, you are expert in this, you've written about this. I'd like to just briefly introduce the ***international*** dimension here, because we've considered all six queens, and this was an age in England where female authority just wasn't a thing really. [Sarah agrees].

If I can put it in that very simplistic way. You didn't really get female leaders, but was that the case on the continent?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:43:22]

No, it wasn't. The continent, I mean, think of both the great empires, think of France and think of Spain and what would become the Habsburg Empire. No, a very strong tradition of female regents in France. Think of Catherine of Aragon's mother, Isabella, you know, who absolutely expected to control, you know, her territories, her armies. It was really only in the ***first*** and the ***last*** of Henry's queens, and of course the second, Anne Boleyn, that really introduced this idea of a woman being able to wield power into England. Henry VII’s ***mother,*** Margaret Beaufort, had done so, of course, but not quite in the same formalised way.

### Tracy Borman [00:44:18]

No, just the king's mother. And not a sort of queen in her own right.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:44:22]

Well, not this thing of being officially left as regent, as both the first and the last queens were, only they.

### Tracy Borman [00:44:33]

So do you think it's taking things too far to say that: collectively, the six queens really paved the way for female sovereignty in England?

### Sarah Gristwood [00:44:44]

Interesting. ***Yes,*** perhaps with a few ups and downs along the way. I mean, I'm not sure that Jane Seymour or Anne of Cleves were really, or indeed, Catherine Howard, were really able or maybe not even inclined to exercise that much power but I think you could almost say there have been three queens who did and three queens who didn't. And Catherine Parr definitely did.

### Tracy Borman [00:45:16]

Yes, she did. And there I fell into the trap that I was determined not to in kind of grouping them, as they're always grouped; ***the six queens, the six wives***! They are individuals. And as you said, some were trailblazers, some were shining examples of female authority, others weren’t.

### Sarah Gristwood [00:45:34]

Exactly. I think that just proves their individuality, if you like.

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

And that's what you've absolutely brought forward this evening in the gathering gloom here in the Holy Day Closet, you have really made Catherine shine.

What a perfect way to end. Sarah, thank you so much. You have really shone a light on, I think, one of the most extraordinary women of the age, not just of the six queens. And a really inspiring and a kind of hopeful way to finish, a sort of nod to the future and certainly in terms of the near future with her stepdaughter Elizabeth, who she had so inspired. That is definitely part of Catherine's legacy. So thank you again for joining me.

**Sarah Gristwood** [00:46:26]

Thank you.

**Tracy Borman** [00:46:27]

Well, that brings us to the end of our series on The Six Queens and what a journey it's been. For me personally, and I hope for ***everyone*** listening, because what we really wanted to do with this series was to look at those six remarkable women in their own right and in their own times.

So, stripping away the gloss, the public image, the unhelpful narratives, getting to who they really were as women and as queens. So, thank you for joining me in this series and my very special guests, and I do hope you've enjoyed the journey.

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

**Tracy Borman** [00:47:13]

[Tracy speaks from the studio, no longer in The Holy Day Closet.]

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.]