# **Historic Royal Palaces Podcast**

# **The Six Tudor Queens:**

# **Jane Seymour with Nicola Tallis**

## **Show Notes**

This week we’re talking about Queen number three, Jane Seymour. Once again Tracy Borman is joined by a fantastic guest, Dr Nicola Tallis will bring Jane to life for us.

Always thought of as the favourite wife, Jane Seymour is best known for giving birth to the male heir that her husband so desired, and for being the one in the rhyme who sadly died. But we don’t know very much about her as a woman and as an individual. In this episode Tracy and Nicola will shed light on this, revealing that Jane may have had more to her than history has allowed.

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.

## **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 yet excited tone.]

Welcome to this new series on the Historic Royal Palaces podcast. I'm Tracy Borman and I have the huge privilege of being Chief Curator here at the palaces. In this new series we will be exploring the lives of the six Tudor queens. Of course, they all have one man in common, but as we know, they are so much more than just wives and queens’ consort. In this series, we hope to do these extraordinary queens justice, but this series will not be biographies of our queens. We'll be exploring and disputing the interpretations that history has offered of them, as well as talking about what they might have been like as women in their own time. To get a sense of the context in which they lived. We'll be stepping into parts of our palaces where they would have walked in a court that was both exciting and toxic in its temperaments. So, join me as we dive into the world of The Six Tudor Queens.

[The theme music finishes and fades out. The sound changes, and Tracy is now in a large, echoey room with Dr. Nicola Tallis.]

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

Well, hello listeners, and you are in for such a treat today because I'm in for a treat. I'm going to be taking you from to my favourite room in the whole of Hampton Court with one of my favourite people, Doctor Nicola Tallis, author, historian, broadcaster. Now, she knows a thing or two about those six Tudor queens. And I'm going to be talking to her about queen number three. So Nicola, welcome to Hampton Court.

**Dr Nicola Tallis [00:01:58]**

[Nicola speaks with a Southern English accent. She has a warm and upbeat voice.]

Thank you so much, Tracy. Always lovely to be here chatting to you. And I'm looking forward to our conversation about Jane.

**Tracy Borman [00:02:06]**

I can't wait to hear your take on Jane Seymour. I have so many questions, and I don't know about you, but there's something special about being in a rather important space that we know is connected with Jane, even if it's changed over the years. And what the best thing is, we get to go behind that rope barrier, behind the scenes. And yeah, hopefully you agree. It's an exciting moment.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:02:34]

Definitely. It's such a treat to be in this space and to get a real sense of Jane in this space and the Tudor court away from the eyes of visitors.

### Tracy Borman [00:02:45]

[The sounds of Tracy and Nicola’s footsteps on the stairs can be heard in the background].

Well, let's not hesitate anymore. Let's climb on up the Silverstick Stairs. That's, we're sort of halfway up now, and I hate to frighten you, Nicola, but, this is one of the most haunted staircases in the whole palace. I think it's a Grey Lady who's occasionally seen wafting down the stairs, but hopefully you are not easily frightened by ghosts.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:03:13]

No, I'm not, and actually, I quite liked the chance to see the Grey Lady and like to ask her who she was.

[both laugh].

### Tracy Borman [00:03:19]

Well, yes! Are you Sybil Penn? Or somebody else? I'm always slightly disappointed by the lack of ghosts that I've encountered during my 15 years here at the Palace.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:03:29]

Have you not seen any?

### Tracy Borman [00:03:30]

Not seen – I felt one once. Once, but you know, or something. But I've never seen one. So maybe today's the day, with you, Nicola.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:03:39]

Maybe today is the day. Maybe we will encounter the Grey Lady together for the first time.

### Tracy Borman [00:03:44]

Absolutely. Well, I should say that as we are progressing through that, we are going to a part of the Palace that is behind the scenes. But you might, listeners, hear the occasional shout, cry, laughter, because this is actually a working space. This is our wardrobe store. So, we're going to see some beautiful historic costumes on our way through. But let's not delay. I always get this kind of flutter as I come towards this room. It's just so special.

[The sound of a heavy door being opened can be heard faintly].

And here we are, Apartment 33. Not very exciting as a title for this room. And I have to say, first impressions, sort of fairly dull shade of green on the walls, green carpet. But it's what happened in this room, that's why it's my favourite room. And we get a clue from this incredible fireplace, which has to be, well, the biggest surviving fireplace in the whole palace. And the bigger the fireplace, the higher the status of the occupant.

And you don't get too much higher than a Queen of England. Jane Seymour, of course, experienced her ***triumph***, but also her end here in Apartment 33. So, Nicola, welcome.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:05:18]

Thank you.

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

To this very appropriate space to be talking about, the third of Henry VIII's Queens. So, Jane Seymour, I think if people have heard of her at all, it's because she had a son, and she was ***apparently*** (but I think we'll go into this) the favourite wife of Henry VIII. But actually, we've got our work cut out here today, haven't we a bit, because we possibly know ***less*** about Jane than any of the other five queens, don't we?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:05:51]

Yeah, that's absolutely right, Tracy. And it's ***sad*** in some ways that we do know so little about her. And yet in some ways, we feel like we remember her the most because of the fact that she provided Henry VIII with that so desperately craved male heir. But we don't know an awful lot about her. And the reasons for that are partially because she was queen for such a short time. So, she is only queen for just over a year really before she passes away, but also, a lot of our information from this period comes from the very gossipy Imperial Ambassador, Eustace Chapuys. And unfortunately, we don't have the majority of his reports for most of Jane's reign, which is a huge travesty because we're missing that really vital mole who knew all the ins and outs of court life and what was going on behind the scenes.

### Tracy Borman [00:06:50]

That's ***so true***, and I can't believe I haven't thought of that before! that because Chapuys is the authority, as you say, brilliant for gossip and what's going on in Henry's court. And yet it's missing that side of things with Jane. [Nicola Agrees]. So that's probably quite a big reason why we don't know so much about her, but could you just tell us a little bit to start with about who she was –Where did she come from?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:07:15]

Yeah. So Jane Seymour comes from a relatively humble background in so much as she's the daughter of a Wiltshire Knight, Sir John Seymour of Wolf Hall, very famous now thanks to Hilary Mantel. [Laughs]. But she does have slightly more prestigious origins through her mother, Margery Wentworth, who was related to Edward III. But she does come from, as I say, quite a humble background, by contrast to some of Henry VIII's other wives, and she is raised primarily at Wolf Hall in the Wiltshire countryside, with a large brood of brothers and sisters.

### Tracy Borman [00:07:54]

So, Jane, she has reasonable credentials for working at the court. You know, she's got that link to Edward III, but frankly, who hasn't really? [Nicola Laughs]. But, apart from that, we know so little about her, but what has history said about Jane Seymour? How do we immediately think of Jane? If you like, what's her sort of character that comes through?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:08:22]

I think, unfortunately for Jane, and perhaps inaccurately, who knows? But we do have this tendency to label her as being ‘*plain Jane’*, because we're told by Chapuys again that she's ***not*** any great beauty, that she's quite pale, and not particularly pretty.

So it seems, in physical terms at least, that perhaps there wasn't necessarily a lot to recommend her to the King. And in terms of her personality as well, there's also not a great deal for us to go on because we don't know a great deal about her in terms of things that she did or said. We know that she's a supposedly quite a contrast to Anne Boleyn in terms of the fact that she's very demure and very meek. But is this the ***true Jane***? Is this a sales ploy, if you like, to lure the King away from Anne Boleyn, or is this really who Jane is? And I suspect it's probably the former, but we don't know for sure.

### Tracy Borman [00:09:26]

Yeah. So perhaps Jane or indeed her ambitious brothers, possibly? So Thomas and Edward were both aspiring courtiers. Perhaps it was they who painted Jane as the very opposite to her predecessor, Anne Boleyn. And that was the point, she had to be meek and mild, where Anne had been feisty and outspoken.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:09:51]

Yeah, absolutely. I definitely think that Jane was primed by her brothers in the role to play, and probably also some of Anne's other enemies, like Nicholas Carew as well, who is a great enemy of Anne Boleyn. I'm sure that these men would all have been instrumental in ***shaping*** Jane's personality for the purposes of attracting the King's attention, and deliberately trying to pick her as an opposite of Anne Boleyn.

### Tracy Borman [00:10:21]

It's frustrating, isn't it, that we have these perceptions of Jane, but drilling down to the woman herself is incredibly difficult. I mean, do we know, for example, this is Reformation England, do we know if she was a reformer, if she was a religious conservative? Are there any clues about that?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:10:42]

Yes. So we do have some clues about that, fortunately for us, insomuch as we know that Jane was a religious conservative, and we know that she had been part of the household of Henry VIII's first wife, Katherine of Aragon, who she seems to have greatly admired.

And I think that in many respects Jane came to emulate Katherine's methods of queenship when her turn to rule came, and this included in terms of religion as well. And we know that she was greatly opposed to the dissolution of the monasteries, which really came under way in the year of her marriage, 1536, and threw herself on her knees before her husband Henry VIII begging him not to destroy the monasteries.

### Tracy Borman [00:11:30]

Well, that's fascinating, because Jane's actually expressing an opinion there then, and standing up for the monasteries to her husband, who is ***crushing*** the monasteries. That's quite brave, isn't it?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:11:45]

Well, it is, and I almost see this as Jane's way of dipping her toe in the water, if you like, and testing the boundaries.

How far can she push Henry in these early days of her marriage? Is this her trying to just be able to ascertain exactly how much power she's got? But if that is the case, then she was soon very quickly brought back down to earth with a shattering blow.

### Tracy Borman [00:12:11]

Oh. What happens?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:12:15]

Well, Henry berates her. He doesn't appreciate her sticking her nose in at all and makes it clear in no uncertain terms that this isn't what he expects of a wife at all, and reminds her of the fate of her predecessor, makes it clear that he doesn't expect his wives to meddle in politics again. And I think that Jane really does take him at his word. She can have been only too conscious of the fate of Anne Boleyn, and I think she was eager to ensure that she didn't meet a similar fate.

### Tracy Borman [00:12:49]

Yes, because – let's just reflect on that. You've made a really good point there.

Because, Anne Boleyn, she succeeded Katherine of Aragon. Well, Katherine hadn't had a very nice end of, kind of, reign. She'd been banished, but that was it. So perhaps Anne felt a bit more confident. You know, she could do what she liked as Queen. But Jane was following a queen who'd had her head cut off on the orders of her husband, who was now, you know, Jane's husband. So that must have been terrifying! She must have been very aware that she was walking on eggshells here.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:13:28]

Absolutely, I mean, she must have been. The idea of a Queen of England being executed was unprecedented in England, and it really did send shockwaves throughout Europe. And Jane must have been very, very painfully aware of this and conscious that her every move was being watched, that she was being judged, and that people were waiting to watch and wait and see how she would behave, how she would react. So, yes, Anne Boleyn's fate before her, I think it was very, very brave of her to even attempt to assert a voice with her husband at this time.

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

And do we know if she ever did it again, or had she been firmly put back in her place?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:14:12]

Well, there's certainly no record of her doing so again. So I think we can safely assume that that was enough to scar her and deter her from meddling again.

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

Well, Nicola, you are an expert on jewellery in this period. In fact, you've written this wonderful book about the jewels of the Tudor Queens.

Did they give us any clues about Jane? Or what, how much do we know about what Jane was wearing, what she actually looked like?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:14:41]

Yeah. So this is really interesting, you know, because we talked about the fact that there aren't a great deal of sources for Jane's life and there are certainly some of Henry's queens who we know a lot more about. But this is one of the reasons why I've enjoyed studying jewellery so much is because I think that we do actually get to see some of Henry's lesser-known wives through a different prism.

And this is certainly true of Jane Seymour, because we do have an inventory of her jewels, and these would have been her personal jewels – so the ones that were owned by her personally, they weren't state property, and they were ones that she would have worn regularly on an everyday basis. And there's more than 500 pieces of jewellery in this inventory.

### Tracy Borman [00:15:28]

Wow!

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:15:29]

Yeah, it's remarkable, isn't it?

### Tracy Borman [00:15:30]

I had no idea there were so many.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:15:32]

Yeah, absolutely. There's loads and loads of different pieces. So there's everything in there from buttons that were decorated with enamelled faces. So this is something that's again very much in keeping with contemporary trends, so shows that she is making an attempt to be fashionable. And we do see this also in Hans Holbein's magnificent portrait of Jane. We see that she is bedecked in the most ***costly*** pieces of jewellery, some of which would later come to be owned by her successors.

But yeah, this jewellery collection that we know that Jane had access to does really tell us quite a lot about her. We know that she liked brooches. There are lots of brooches in the collection, and there's lots of jewelled pins that would have been used to fasten her clothes together. Interestingly, there's also a mirror as well. So we can assume that she did care about her appearance just ***a little bit***.

### Tracy Borman [00:16:31]

Just a bit. Is there a sense of this, of this young woman from the backwater that was Wolf Hall now enjoying herself? She's going to make the most of her royal bling and her royal status.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:16:45]

Yeah, absolutely. And I think, again, this is something that Holbein's portrait of Jane really shows us, because she is wearing the very finest of clothes that are fashioned from the most costly of materials. And I think that this portrait we can take as a reflection of how Jane wanted us to remember her as a queen. So she's also wearing this magnificent IHS brooch, so a transliteration of the first three letters of the name Jesus in Greek. So this is a significant marker of Catholic piety. So she wants to be seen as a religious queen, someone who's devout and someone who's also ***magnificent***, which we see in the magnificent ouche she's wearing around her neck.

***Tracy Borman [00:17:32]***

So for those not in the know about jewellery, tell us - an ***ouche***?

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### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:17:37]

Yeah, don't you think, I think that's a magnificent word. It is brilliant. And an ouche basically means a particularly rich or elaborate kind of jewel. And if you look at this Holbein portrait of Jane, you'll see that this ouche is exactly that, because it hangs from Jane's neck, it's made of ruby, pearl and diamond, and it's just absolutely spectacular.

### Tracy Borman [00:18:01]

Wow. Ouche. That's a word we should use more often. It's very satisfying.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:18:06]

It really is. Yeah.

[Nicola Laughs].

### Tracy Borman [00:18:08]

There's some small irony, I think, in the fact that you've really brought Jane to life visually there, and we probably have the best portrait of Jane. And yet we know the least about her character. So we know visually what she looked like thanks to that, as you say, that staggeringly ***vivid*** Holbein portrait.

But personality wise, we have to infer from these little snippets, her brief attempt to assert herself about the monasteries. Not much else, is there? Do we get a sense that she's, you know, really going to just conform, that she's, that she's acting the part of Queen very effectively? Is there anything?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:18:55]

I think that there's two other things that we can infer about Jane. One of which relates to what you were saying about her acting the part of Queen because I do think that as soon as she marries Henry, she becomes very, very conscious of her royal status and she does seem to impose strict moral standards on her household.

I think that's quite crucial. I think that tells us that she wants to be a queen who, you know, fulfils all of the traditional roles of women in terms of being seen to be subservient but also that she does care about the moral welfare of her ladies. She wants them to be chaste and virtuous, and also seems to have been quite aloof from some of these ladies. So there aren't necessarily any records of her being particularly close to any members of her household. That's not to say that she wasn't, that's just to say that we don't have those records. But somebody that she certainly ***was*** close to, and that we know a bit more about is her eldest stepdaughter, Mary. So she seems to have had a really close relationship with Mary and to her credit, considering that Mary, of course, ***isn't*** her daughter, she's the daughter of Katherine of Aragon. Jane does seem to have been a key figure in helping to heal that rift between her husband and Mary.

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

So two things you said there really resonate with me. Her, you know, insisting on quite a strict moral code amongst her household and also identifying with the daughter of Katherine of Aragon.

And I know she doesn't have much to do with the daughter of Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth. So both of those things really are sending out a clear message. “Look, I'm moral, I'm close to Katherine of Aragon's daughter. Basically, I'm not going anywhere near Anne Boleyn, her memory. I'm not going to take the same path as she did. Basically, I'm going to be the exact opposite of Anne Boleyn”.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:21:05]

Yeah, exactly that. So Anne has set a pretty disastrous base for queenship in some ways, in terms of how she ended her reign. And I think Jane is very keen to disassociate herself from anything to do with her. And, you know, I think it's also quite, quite a savvy move on her part as well, because she knows how popular Katherine of Aragon has been and she knows how unpopular the idea of Henry marrying Anne Boleyn was. So I think it's a very clever strategy on her part, and one that is borne out of more than just adoration for Katherine of Aragon.

### Tracy Borman [00:21:44]

I think you're absolutely right. I think what's appearing for me, or what's emerging for me in our discussion, is that she is quite a canny operator. She's quite clever. She knows how to position herself. She's got some control over the image that she wants to project which is, you know, exactly ***right,*** because she absolutely has to avoid going down the same road as her predecessor, Anne Boleyn.

I'd like to just consider now a bit about Jane and Henry. Now. I don't want to dwell too much on the elephant in the room that is Henry VIII. But, in the musical ‘*Six’*, which I'm a super fan of, I think it's fair to say, Jane's song is the only one that disappoints me because she sings all about being so in love with Henry and the tragedy of having to leave him so soon. Do you think Jane did love Henry?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:22:43]

Well, certainly not in the sense that she's portrayed as doing so in ‘*Six’*.

[Both women laugh].

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:22:50]

I think there's far more to it than this, I think. I mean, who knows? It's difficult to know what the nature of her true feelings towards Henry were. But let's face it, he wasn't the most prepossessing in physical terms by the time she met him.

### Tracy Borman [00:23:03]

No, he's not in his prime anymore, is he?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:23:05]

No, exactly. But in many respects, she isn't either. Because by the time that she actually meets Henry and marries him, she's, what, about 27, 28 years old, so quite old by contemporary standards to be making a first marriage. And, you know, she probably didn't want to be left on the shelf, in some respects, I can't help thinking. And so I think that it is definitely a clear strategy of hers, and one that's probably based more on political ambitions rather than personal desires.

### Tracy Borman [00:23:40]

And I kind of think the same of Henry, not that I want to spend too much time thinking about it, but it's only later that Jane becomes the favourite wife. Early in the marriage there are reports that Henry's regretting it, that actually he's going around saying there are better looking women at court I could have married, but then everything changes, doesn't it.

Early in 1537, there are those hoped for signs of ***pregnancy***.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:24:09]

Absolutely. And I think that Jane must have been quite relieved at this time to find herself pregnant, because there had been some concerns expressed by those at court about the fact that she hadn't become pregnant immediately. So I think the fact that suddenly she did show these all important signs must have been a moment of triumph, but also one of great anxiety considering what had happened to both of the previous wives and their sad histories when it came to child bearing.

### Tracy Borman [00:24:42]

Absolutely. The pressure must have been intense on Jane. She knew how much was riding on this pregnancy, because she'd been conscious that Henry had been king for nearly 30 years now, and throughout that time had not managed to have a living son or not one who lived for longer than a few weeks. He needed that male heir. She would have been in no doubt, would she, that that was her priority number one.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:25:07]

Yeah, absolutely. And as you say, the pressure on her must have been so intense and coming from all sides because she knew that in Henry's eyes, the future security of his realm depended on this one life, the one male life that she was hopefully going to provide. And so I think that that would have been a great deal of external pressure, not to mention any pressure that Jane must have felt herself.

### Tracy Borman [00:25:34]

Absolutely. So she's pregnant, it's the early months of 1537. And, towards the summer, I think she moves here to Hampton Court, which Henry has been busy kind of refurbishing in her honour. And she takes her leave of the court to enter her confinement.

Can you sort of paint a picture of a confinement? Because it's all thanks to one of your subjects, Nicola, Lady Margaret Beaufort has a lot to answer in terms of what royal women had to go through when they were about to give birth, because she'd set down the rules, hadn't she, for the confinement, the ‘lying in’ of a royal wife?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:26:17]

Yes, that's right, she did. And they were rules that every royal wife seemed to conform to. And for Jane I can't help but feel quite sorry for her in this respect, because they were stifling as they were lavish. So we know that when she would have entered this room, she would have been sleeping in a huge tester bed. So a huge four poster bed, which would have been covered with lavish coverings and pillows, that would all have been wonderful, but there would have been no air in here whatsoever, because all of the windows would have been blocked and covered over. It was believed that any light might frighten the infant when it was born, and the fire here would have been stoked, so it would have been incredibly, incredibly hot and claustrophobic for her. No fresh air whatsoever and no real contact with the outside world, just her female attendants.

### Tracy Borman [00:27:18]

Suffocating. And yet, if we just move over here to the window, it's a shame, isn't it? Because you get a great view from here. We're looking out over that magnificent astronomical clock that Henry later installed. But this is a beautiful courtyard, as it would have been in Jane's day. But this view would have been barred from her. She couldn't have looked out.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:27:40]

No, exactly. She would have had no sense of this whatsoever. And the only real sense, I suppose, that she would have had, that she was in a palace, would have been that she would presumably still have been able to hear all of the hustle and bustle as the servants were running around with logs for the fire, taking food to the tables and performing their daily tasks. So that would ***really*** have been Jane's only kind of contact with the outside world.

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

Gosh, as if the pressure wasn't on enough, and then this whole stifling atmosphere that you've conjured up must've just added to that. Absolutely terrifying. Well, talk us through what happened next. When Jane's labour pains began, how did it progress?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:28:28]

So Jane had a very, very painful and long labour, which lasted three days, three nights, I mean ***agony***, and began on the 9th of October. So it was a very traumatic experience for her.

### Tracy Borman [00:28:46]

I mean, horrific to imagine, even today with modern day pain relief. Three days of labour. Well, I know from those ordinances that your friend, Lady Margaret Beaufort, laid down, that there was pain relief, but it was usually things like, get the skin of an ox, tie it around the thigh of the labouring woman. And that was supposed to work wonders? So, poor Jane, really, there's nothing, is there? She's having to just endure this.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:29:14]

There were later reports that suggested that perhaps Jane had had some kind of caesarean section. We know now that that's definitely not the case. And you know that the doctors had supposedly said to Henry that only one life could be saved, either that of the mother or of the infant, and that he was supposed to have said to save the infant, because other wives could easily be found. But again, very, very unlikely to have been the case.

### Tracy Borman [00:29:45]

Well, I agree with you. I think that that almost certainly was a myth about the possible caesarean and Henry opting to save the child. It doesn't stack up, does it.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:29:53]

No, no.

### Tracy Borman [00:29:55]

So, Jane does give birth. Naturally.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:29:58]

She does. On the 12th of October, 1537, in this very room.

### Tracy Borman [00:30:05]

Ohhhh. In this room. That's what excites me about working here, history where it happens.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:30:10]

Absolutely. We are in the very place where Henry VIII hoped for, longed for, desperately craved, male heir entered the world.

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

So all is rejoicing. Henry is told the news?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:30:26]

Yeah. Everyone is triumphant. ‘*Te Deum’* is sang throughout London. There are bonfires, there are celebrations. Everybody is absolutely elated and really, really shares in Henry's utter joy. The kingdom is just absolutely thrilled.

### Tracy Borman [00:30:44]

Yes. At last, after all this time, there is a son and heir for England. The Tudor dynasty is secure. And presumably lots of celebrations here at Hampton Court.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:30:57]

Exactly. Lots of celebrations. Although there had been an outbreak of plague. So Henry was very, very wary about allowing courtiers to come to Hampton Court. Especially those who have been close to or in areas where there had been the plague. So now that he's got this male heir, Henry is certainly not going to take any risks with his life.

### Tracy Borman [00:31:21]

We see an increasing paranoia in that respect, I guess understandably so. But Edward is christened here, with great ceremony. I think at night it's a torch lit procession. Did Jane play any part in that?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:31:38]

She didn't actually take part in the christening itself, which was very much in keeping with protocol for the time. So neither Katherine of Aragon, nor Anne Boleyn, had attended the christenings of their daughters either or their children either. And, but it is a hugely elaborate ceremony, like you say. And the Lady Mary, Katherine of Aragon, daughter, plays the role of godmother. It's all very grand but the baby is processed into Jane's bedchamber to greet her whilst she's sitting up in bed at the end of the ceremony. So that's the role that she gets to play.

### Tracy Borman [00:32:16]

Gosh, a real moment of triumph for Jane. She must have very much enjoyed that. Have I imagined it... if Jane's unquiet ghost is trying to get in, there is this rattling of the window now and again? [Nicola Laughs]. I'm just very conscious of that. And as I say, it is supposed to be quite a haunted space. But let's not dwell on that. Well, very tragically, it's a short-lived triumph for Jane, isn't it?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:32:40]

It certainly is. To all appearances, Jane makes a recovery from the birth. Immediately after, she seems well, she's eating, she's sitting up in bed. But the day after the christening, things take a turn for the worst when Jane becomes ill and she has diarrhoea. Her servants are blamed for giving her too much rich food, and to all intents and purposes, many people believed that she had the onset of puerperal fever, childbed fever, which was caused by doctors' unhygienic, dirty hands.

### Tracy Borman [00:33:20]

Okay. I'm so pleased you said that. Because I can never say that word. I just say childbed fever because it’s too difficult. Otherwise, it ends up as purple fever when I say it! [Nicola laughs]

So it might have been that...I know there is another theory. Alison Weir has put forward that it's food poisoning effectively. That because of these rich foods that you mentioned that Jane had been fed that they caused, you know, food poisoning and then, you know, the effects of that. Then there might have been a sort of secondary infection from that. We don't know, though, of course.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:33:57]

No, but I do think that Alison's theory is very credible. And then, you know, she suggests that Jane may have then suffered from an embolism. And I think that refresh of looking at the doctor's report is very interesting and definitely provides us with an alternative view that perhaps is very welcome.

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

I think it's very credible, but it's also sad, isn't it? So 12th of October, the future Edward VI is born on the 24th of October, his mother passes away. So presumably now the court is immediately plunged into mourning after celebrating.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:34:34]

Yeah, that's exactly right. So you can only imagine the mix of emotions that people must have felt when they were here at this time, because there's the elation at Edward's birth in this very room. And then just days later, the woman who had brought that life into the world loses her own life within these same walls. And Jane is laid in state in the chapel where a vigil is kept over it, which is primarily headed by her stepdaughter, Lady Mary, and to all outward appearances, Henry VIII was grieving very greatly for Jane Seymour, and he says this in a letter to François I, the French King, soon after Jane's death, about the grief that he was feeling and these mixed emotions. So it's a very, very difficult and tragic outcome.

### Tracy Borman [00:35:33]

Absolutely. Yeah, it's sort of now bittersweet, the birth of Edward. It's this, you know, incredible moment for Henry. But it's very soon followed by tragedy.

But in a way, can we also see the silver lining for Jane in that? Because her reputation was secured. She'd given Henry a son. She hadn't lived long enough to upset Henry in any way. So she's gone down in history as the favourite wife.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:36:05]

Yeah, exactly. So, in that respect, history has done her a great big favour, really. Because, as you say, she didn't have an opportunity to make any mistakes and she has earned that badge of being Henry's favourite wife, the one who he loved the most. Whether that's actually true or not? [Nicola Laughs].

### Tracy Borman [00:36:23]

I think you share my scepticism on that.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:36:26]

Yeah.

### Tracy Borman [00:36:28]

But of course, for Tudor propaganda, she had to be the favourite wife. And she's the one you see here in the painting of, of Henry and his family. She's painted into it seven years after her death, because she's the one Henry wants everyone to remember because of what happened here in this room all those years ago. Well, how has it felt for you, Nicola? Telling Jane's story here in the room that would decide her destiny.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:37:00]

It's a huge privilege. It's so atmospheric in this room even today. And I'm sure that you get the same sense as I do where you can just, you can feel the history that's happened around you and the people that have been here just a few hundred years before we have. And the mix of emotions that they must have felt.

### Tracy Borman [00:37:22]

You really can. It's very...shivers down the spine, I think, for me. Well, we've talked about Jane and from what you've told me, Nicola, you know, she seems very much a woman of her time because this was a time when women were subservient to their husbands and they were sort of, the second class citizens of society. And they didn't ruffle any feathers. So in a way, Jane conformed to that. She didn't challenge the norm in the same way as Anne Boleyn had done.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:37:54]

No. Or she certainly didn't do so successfully. Again, had Henry responded differently to her pleas for the monasteries, then who knows what side of her personality we may have seen. But I think that that was very quickly nipped in the bud, and she did very quickly fall back into conforming into the expected role of a woman.

### Tracy Borman [00:38:16]

Absolutely. Well, in this series, we're trying really hard not to kind of set one wife against the other, just compare them. What were they like next to each other? But we have with Jane Seymour, and you have very powerfully evoked just how much Jane did this deliberately herself, because in a way, this was essential to her survival. She had to be seen publicly to be very different to Anne Boleyn, for obvious reasons. So it's not so much, I think, us comparing the two. This was something Jane was doing herself, wasn't she?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:38:58]

Absolutely. And this is really how she becomes Queen in the first place is by, as you said, appearing so polar opposite to Anne. And how much of this is done under her own steam, and how much of this is encouraged by her supporters?

We don't know for sure, but I'm sure that there is certainly some element of Jane driving this and driving this differentiation between herself and Anne, and it only becomes more and more apparent as Henry's favour for Jane increases.

### Tracy Borman [00:39:32]

And that is a really, I think, telling example of some political coming on Jane's part. She wasn't just meek and mild plain Jane, as history often relegates her to that description. You know, here's a woman who has some agency and she has some ***nous*** as well. So good for her drawing that comparison, because it was the route to survival. And just a sort of final thought, you know, having considered her life, her personality, her appearance, that you've brought dazzlingly to life, what do you personally think of Jane Seymour?

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:40:14]

Do you know this is a very difficult one? [Nicola and Tracy Laugh]. But I do think that in some senses we've done her an injustice. This sounds quite odd, but I do think we've done her an injustice by labelling her as the favourite wife, because I do think that there was far more to her than that. And we've spoken about her jewellery, for example. So I think that this was somebody who very much knew what she was doing, who did have her own voice, and certainly at one point wasn't afraid to use it. And when she was forbidden from using it in a political sphere, she tried to use it elsewhere in terms of crafting her image and that image of magnificence, of splendour. I think she really did set about trying to create this other powerful persona as a Queen consort, and one who was able to do so through her clothes and her jewels. So I think that we should remember her as somebody who perhaps had more agency than we may think. And as somebody who ultimately doesn't deserve that label.

### Tracy Borman [00:41:24]

Well, you have certainly convinced me that when it comes to Jane Seymour, there's very definitely more than meets the eye. So thank you for joining me, Nicola. It's been such a joy and, really to experience Jane's story with you here in the room where so much happened in the history, not just of Jane, but of England. And also, my favourite room. So thank you.

### Dr Nicola Tallis [00:41:53]

My pleasure.

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

### Brett Dolman [00:41:55]

[Brett Dolman speaks over the top. He has a Southern English accent and speaks clearly from the studio, without echo.]

Thanks for listening to this episode. I'm Brett Dolman, I'm Curator of Collections for Historic Royal Palaces, and next time I'll be joining Tracy to discuss Anne of Cleves.

### Tracy Borman [00:42:06]

[Tracy speaks from the studio, no longer in apartment 33.]

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.]