# **Historic Royal Palaces Podcast**

# **The Six Tudor Queens:**

# **Anne of Cleves with Tracy Borman**

## **Show Notes**

Tracy Borman talks about her favourite of the Six Tudor Queens, Anne of Cleves. Divorced, so the rhyme goes, for being the ‘ugly’ Queen.

Anne’s looks were the least interesting thing about her, but her story has been dominated by them for centuries. Tracy is joined by fellow Curator Brett Dolman to unpack this fixation on appearance and reveal the woman beneath the myths.

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.

[Read more about Anne of Cleves here.](https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/history-and-stories/anne-of-cleves/#gs.4qzr8n)

## **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.]

**Brett Dolman** [00:01:25]

[After a beat of silence, the sound changes. Brett speaks outside in Chapel Court, a large open space. He has a Southern English accent and speaks animatedly.]

Well, we're standing in Chapel Court, which is part of the Tudor part of Hampton Court Palace. It is beautifully decorated as a Tudor garden. And I'm surrounded by the royal beasts, which are a modern replica of the almost 100 royal beasts that once decorated Henry VIII's Privy Garden at Hampton Court.

My name is Brett Dolman, I am Curator of Collections for Historic Royal Palaces, based here at Hampton Court. And we are here today for the fourth podcast in our series on Henry VIII's queens. We're going to do things a little bit differently today. Obviously, I am not Tracy Borman, but I am joined by Tracy Borman, and it is Tracy that's going to be talking about Anne of Cleves, who is, I believe, your favourite of Henry VIII's queens. Is that right, Tracy?

### Tracy Borman [00:02:11]

She ***is***! And I have to say Brett, I'm feeling a little bit under pressure now because I'm so used to being the interviewer. It's a bit like a poacher turned gamekeeper or something like that. So I really want to do Anne justice. She's so often overlooked, dismissed, the ***ugly*** wife and all these other myths about her, and I want to set the record straight today.

### Brett Dolman [00:02:31]

So before we start talking about Anne, where is it in the palace that we're going to go today, Tracy?

### Tracy Borman [00:02:36]

Well, it's somewhere you'll be very familiar with, because it's our offices. It's the Curators' offices, which are in Apartment 25. Quite appropriate, it being part of the former nursery of Edward VI. Henry VIII's precious jewel of a son. So we're going to head for those very familiar spiral stairs.

[The sound of footsteps walking on a gravel path can be heard, followed by a key fob opening a large and heavy door leading to the Curators’ offices.]

### Brett Dolman [00:03:16]

So we've climbed the stairs and we are now sitting down in our offices, which is the curators' office at Hampton Court Palace. Bit of a strange question for this particular familiar room, Tracy, but how does this make you feel as we're about to discuss the life of Anne of Cleves?

### Tracy Borman [00:03:32]

Well, yeah, you're right, because this is the office that I share with Lucy Worsley, and, obviously, therefore, I come in here on a regular basis and if I'm perfectly honest, most times I come in here, I'm thinking about work.

But today, it's actually nice to take a step back and think about this space in relation to my favourite of the six queens, Anne of Cleves. Because this was part of the nursery, if you like, of the future Edward VI. So Henry VIII has a son, and in a way that tees up our discussion quite nicely, because the pressure is sort of off for the next wife, Jane Seymour, who died a few days after giving birth to Edward. So queen number four doesn't have quite the same pressure. Although, of course, a spare heir is always helpful. So it's very nice to be up here for a different reason today than having meetings and answering emails.

But of course, Hampton Courts played even more of a role in Anne of Cleves story and in particular the Council Chamber, which I know is a space you know particularly well, Brett, because it was there in the Council Chamber that Henry's marriage to Anne and indeed, you know, the lead up to that would have been discussed. So lots of history where it happened today.

### Brett Dolman [00:04:57]

Well, let's dive in then. Anne of Cleves, what is history's traditional view of Anne? How could we, how is she normally summarised by historians and by the general public?

### Tracy Borman [00:05:07]

Well, she's famously the ‘ugly wife’! The one who history has really dismissed because Henry dismissed her and she was married to him for less time than the other five. And that's often where history begins and ends when it comes to Anne of Cleves. But she was so much more than that. So, she's a German princess, if you like, or noblewoman –very well born. She's the daughter of John III, Duke of Cleves. I should really say Anna von Kleve, but my German is ***very much*** GCSE level, so I am going to say Anne of Cleves, I'm going to anglicise it. And so Cleves was part of the Holy Roman Empire, in the Tudor period. Of course, it's now part of Germany. And, so she's well born, and she's actually first mooted as a potential wife for Henry shortly after Jane Seymour's death. I think Thomas Cromwell is already lining her up as a potential bride for a very good reason: Because Cleves has strong links to Lutheranism, (the sort of the Protestant Reformation that's starting to sweep across Europe) and of course, Cromwell very much wants that to sweep across England, too. So he is definitely in team Anne from the beginning. But in fact, it's not until two years later, 1539, that Henry formally instructs Cromwell and his ambassadors to begin negotiations for an alliance, a marriage alliance with Cleves.

### Brett Dolman [00:07:07]

Well, you've outlined Anne beautifully there. And you've also taken away some of my potential second question [Tracy and Brett Laugh], which is to say, you know that Anne is automatically or often dismissed as being just Henry's fourth wife, the one that didn't last very long but she is – as you've said, more than that.

You've talked a little bit about her background. I think we'll explore a bit more of that in a minute and you've outlined her marriage, but of course, she also carried on after Henry, didn't she? I mean, after the divorce. Is this also a story of survival, perhaps?

### Tracy Borman [00:07:40]

It is. And yet in that old rhyme, you know, divorced, beheaded, died, she falls into the divorced category, but she ***did*** survive! And she didn't just survive, Henry, she survived all of the other five queens, so she was the, the longest lived, not the oldest at the time of her death. But she outlived the others. And she ***so much*** more than even a survivor. I think she's a huge success story. I think we can lay claim to Anne of Cleves being the most successful of Henry's queens. And that's a big reason why she's my favourite,

But I think probably, you know, in this series we've talked a lot about the myths surrounding the six queens. I would say Anne of Cleves is more deeply entrenched in myth than any of the other five. And I think we can't get away in our discussion today from talking about her appearance because that's probably the biggest myth.

But I hope that we can unpack a lot more about her character, who she was, and not just, yeah, fixate on ‘was she ugly? Was she not? Why didn't Henry like her?’ Let's have a think about what she thought about Henry, too, in the course of our discussion.

### Brett Dolman [00:09:02]

So we're going to try and get away, I hope, from this, Henry centered approach to Anne's story. Perhaps also this Anglo-centric approach to talking about somebody who came from a country which was very different to England in terms of its, perhaps its, its cultural traditions, and its immediate political and religious history, although there were similarities too. And I think, you know, it's true that for most people it's as if and didn't exist before or after her marriage. So we're going to try and right that wrong and add a little bit more colour to her story.

So is there anything more that you can say about Anne of Cleves' background in Cleves? Is there something that we can draw out there that might tell us a little bit more about her? You've already said that she was the daughter of Johan or John, Duke of Cleves and Maria, who is the heir of Jülich. So it's another one of these small German principalities that are effectively independent of the Holy Roman Empire. Can we talk a bit more about what that meant? What is Cleves? Was it a cultural backwater? What was her upbringing like?

### Tracy Borman [00:10:07]

Yeah, absolutely. And, well, Cleves was far from being a backwater, although it was very different, of course, to England. I don't just want to get straight into comparing it, but it had different cultural traditions. It was a real melting pot when it came to religion because Anne's mother in particular was very staunchly Catholic but Anne's ***brother***, who then became Duke of Cleves in the same year that her marriage was agreed with Henry VIII, was a Lutheran, so completely different.

It's hard to get to exactly what Anne herself was, in terms of religion. We know a little bit about how she was educated, and she was skilled in – I hate to say it, but sort of fairly traditional female accomplishments like needlework and the like. She loved music, she liked card games and gambling, and that was entirely typical of the upbringing of a German noblewoman or, you know, even above that; the daughter of the Duke of Cleves.

But of course, that was rather different to what Henry VIII was used to in his queens. She wasn't, for example, accomplished at languages. We think she could only speak German. She could read and write in German, certainly. She didn't dance, she didn't play musical instruments. So, quite different and quite limited, I guess, compared to the likes of, you know – I'm going to mention her, the ***other*** Anne, Anne Boleyn, the more famous one who, you know, is widely praised, even by her enemies, by her many accomplishments.

So Anne seems to have been part of a fairly close knit family. She had, she had as well as her brother, she had sisters and ***clearly*** she's prized. This is the age when alliances are made through marriage and as young as 11, because if you think Anne was born in about 1515, and when she was about 11 or possibly 12, she was betrothed to the son and heir of the Duke of Lorraine. And that would have an impact later on in her story once she was in England.

On the subject of the political landscape, one thing I would like to just add is that Henry VIII at the time that this marriage to Anne was mooted, is short of friends, really, is a simple way of putting it. But there's this emerging potential alliance between the two greatest powers in Europe: Charles V and Francis I, King of France. That leaves Henry vulnerable, and so this really does enhance Cleves as a potential ally. I think it's just important stress that otherwise we might think, well, yes, there's the Protestant angle, but why on earth would Henry go all the way to Cleves for his next bride? But yeah, he's short of allies, basically.

### Brett Dolman [00:13:22]

There are political and religious complications to these European dynastic marriages. And yet for Henry, this is something quite new. Because how has Henry chosen all of his other wives, Tracy?

### Tracy Borman [00:13:33]

Well, [Tracy chuckles] so there's no such thing as a sort of purely romantic marriage, if you like, or choice of bride in Henry VIII's history. There's ***always*** politics at play, but, and this is really crucial because it's something that Thomas Cromwell does not really give enough value to: Henry likes to be in love, and he likes to play the game of courtly love. That's very important to him and so it's not going to be just enough for Henry to go down the route of a political and religious alliance. That could be an important part of it, but he wants to also ***be in love***, and that's why there's quite a lot of emphasis on what Anne of Cleves looks like. And that's really where it all begins, this myth, I think.

### Brett Dolman [00:14:30]

Of course, up to this point, Henry has met at least and ***got to know*** his three previous wives before committing himself to them. And that will be the case too, with wives numbers five and six. But, with Anne, he hasn't met her so he's reliant on descriptions and images of her in the run up to the marriage negotiations. So, Tracy, perhaps tell us a little bit about what actually happened in 1539 and 1540.

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

So, yes, because Henry wants to be assured that, you know, he's taking this leap of faith, as you say, this is going to be the first wife he hasn't actually met before agreeing to marry. So he wants information and I should say that when you read the contemporary descriptions of Anne, there are pretty much none that say, ‘well, she's not much to look at’ (I mean, perhaps that's inevitable because this is, you know, there are lots of people with a vested interest in making this marriage work) but for example, Marillac, the French Ambassador, describes Anne as being ‘tall, slim, of middling beauty,’ and I love this, ‘with a resolute countenance’. She's going to need that resolute countenance, I think, in the years to come.

And then other eyewitnesses describe her with fair hair, yellow and long. Others talk about her ‘beauty and goodly visage’ and that ‘every creature rejoiced to behold her’. Well, Henry, he's been around quite a long time by now. You know, he's been king for pretty much 30 years so he doesn't just rely on the flattering language of his ambassadors and others. He wants to see what, Anne looks like. So, the most famous artist of the age, one you are very familiar with, I know, Brett, is Hans Holbein. And he is dispatched to take Anne's likeness and that of her younger sister, Amalia. I think we should stress that, there are two potential queens in play here from Cleves. And Holbein carries out his commission, very faithfully. And the portrait that is sent back to Henry so delights him that according to the contemporary sources, that's, that's the clincher for Henry. He sees this portrait of Anne of Cleves. He prefers it to the one of her, her sister Amalia. And that's when he starts taking this marriage seriously.

**Brett Dolman** [00:17:09]

There's an even longer back story to this idea of trying to get hold of an image of Anne and indeed of Amalia. Nicholas Wotton and Richard Beard, the the envoys to Cleves, the English envoys are originally shown different portraits of both sisters, in the spring of 1539, and they complain that they're not good enough, they don't show enough of their characteristics their physical presence. They are robed in traditional, quite disguising Cleves dresses. And eventually this is the reason why Holbein is dispatched from England to paint new portraits. And this is, in Anne's case, the portrait that survives today in the Louvre, in Paris. And this portrait is described by Nicholas Wotton as ‘very lively’. And now that's... lively is very interesting and much used word in 16th century, art history criticism, if you like. It can mean a range of things, it can mean a life like vividness, forcefulness or potency, and a delightfulness of execution, which will give pleasure. What none of those suggest are fabrication or idealisation though, and they are no contemporary criticisms of the portrait at all. It's often said in history books that the real thing, Anne in the flesh, was a Flanders mare compared to the portrait.

Now this is a description which comes in much, much later, 150 years later. I think originally termed by the historian Bishop Burnet, who's incredibly disappointed by Anne's failure to be the reformist queen that she promised to be. Because Bishop Burnet was engaged in a book in the late 17th century called The History of the English Reformation. And this is an idea that's then taken up by Tobias Smollett, who's writing in the 18th century, where he says the king found her so different from her picture, which had been drawn by Holbein, that in the impatience of his disappointment, he swore they had bought him a Flanders mare. So this is all much later, rewriting of history, and in particular, it's not what Holbein would have been employed to do. Holbein was the most respected artist for creating a lifelike impression of somebody that wasn't there. That was what he was in the business of doing. It's one of the principal roles of portraiture to stand in for someone's presence, to show someone what they actually look like.

And I think also when we talk about Tudor portraiture, there's this terrible tendency to project, or for historians to project their own opinions about an individual onto the few portraits that survived from the Tudor period as a route, even to establishing some sort of psychological insight into the character of the person that's portrayed. Now, this is lazy and anachronistic. Tudor portraits were meant as likenesses, but not psychological essays. So we could look at Holbein's portrait of Anne and we can argue whether it proves that Anne was beautiful or not, but we'd be missing the point. I think for Henry in particular, as Tracy said, a man who chose all his other wives because he already knew them and was attracted by them. A portrait simply proved an insufficient substitute for meeting the real women. So this is all less a criticism of Holbein, and certainly not of Anne, more the impossibility of representing, in the 16th century, through a two dimensional image in paint, the entirety of a sitter's profile, and a figure still less her personality and character, or the way that she smiled. These things that create attraction when you really, genuinely meet somebody.

And I'll say one more thing about portraiture. Is that what's interesting in all of this is that we know we've already said that Anne survived long after the marriage in 1514. Another 17 years, in fact. But we don't have later portraits of her. But it seems quite likely that a portrait was painted. And so we are hanging our opinion of her, in that sense, on one portrait that survives from 1540 rather than later portraits, when she had absorbed English fashions, and had become part of the English court. And we may not have found that because we are just looking in the wrong place. There are so many Tudor portraits that still are recorded as Unknown Woman.

**Tracy Borman** [00:21:41]

I'm so pleased that you've just really vividly set out the whole portrait appearance issue for me, Brett, because of course, that's the bit that we all know, really. Well, not the nuance and the, everything that that goes into it. But, what history has told us is that Holbein paints this likeness of Anne. Henry likes it very much. He agrees to marry her and then effectively, in the immortal words of ‘*Six: The Musical’*, she doesn't look like her profile pic when she comes over to England. And as well, you mentioned there the fashion. And I think that's an important point, because one eyewitness described her as being dressed in monstrous habit and strange clothing. So it wasn't what the English court was used to. For me, though, Anne's physical appearance had nothing to do with Henry's reaction when the pair met. So to paint the scene, Anne makes her way towards England in great style, it takes her a very long time to reach England. She sort of progresses from Cleves, eventually reaching Calais, with, you know, great celebration and great ceremony. And then they have to wait for, for favourable winds to kind of blow her across the channel right at the end of the year 1539. So it's kind of, a fairly windswept Anne who arrives on English shores, and she makes her way to Rochester.

And the plan had been for Henry to meet her in London, sort of close to Greenwich. But no, because, as I mentioned, Henry likes to be a player in the game of courtly love. He decides to follow this very courtly tradition of riding to meet his true love in disguise. So he dons a disguise for their first meeting, which took place on on New Year's Day. Just another reason why I love Anne of Cleves, it's my birthday. New Year's Day, 1540. They meet at Rochester, and Henry bursts into the room in full disguise. And the theory is, according to the rules of courtly love, you know, your true love will recognise you anywhere. But, Anne doesn't recognise Henry. You can see her from the description, she's completely thrown. Who is this man who's kind of, walked over to me very boldly, I don't know who he is. She's pretty shocked by this. And Henry sees the confusion, and he realises that she doesn't recognise him. So he leaves the room, and then he comes back without his disguise. And then eventually, because of how everybody else is sort of bowing to him and treating him, Anne realises her mistake. She hasn't recognised her betrothed, her soon to be husband Henry VIII. I think that was really where the rot set in for Henry, this was Anne of Cleves, his bride, yet she doesn't really recognise him. And she doesn't, I think, seem that pleased when she does recognise him.

So let's just shift the focus here. I've certainly been guilty of this. We tend to see it through Henry's eyes. So Henry is a man who loves the game of courtly love. And, you know, he rides in disguise to meet Anne, and she doesn't recognise him. And therein lies the problem, or the beginning of the problems. But let's think of it from Anne's perspective. She's arrived in this strange country, middle of winter, foul weather. She's escorted to Rochester, probably still pretty bewildered and exhausted from this very long journey. And she hasn't been tutored in English court life. Perhaps a cursory mention by the ladies who meet her over in Calais, but she doesn't understand how things operate, she doesn't understand the game of courtly love. So then, when Henry and his entourage sort of burst in on her, of course she's completely taken aback. She's shocked. She doesn't know what's going on. She can't speak English or very, very rudimentary English by this stage. And so she's completely shellshocked. Little wonder that she reacts as she does and then tries to make up for it a little bit, once she realises that this is her betrothed. But I think from Anne's perspective, this must have been a bewildering, quite frightening experience. And I think really, Henry, perhaps, no definitely, should have shown greater sensitivity, that Anne wasn't necessarily going to know the rules of his game. He ought to have respected that, here's a woman from a very different background, cultural background, to most women that he knows in the English court. But as ever, with Henry the narcissist, he sees it all from his perspective. And then Anne, you know, as the days go forward, gradually has to acclimatise to this very alien way of life that she's now encountering.

**Brett Dolman** [00:27:25]

So Anne, I think, finds herself in this horrible position of being, of having this culture clash with a man twice her age who she doesn't know, in a country which is very alien to her in terms of customs and expectations. She's also, as we've explained in the middle of this political and religious, ever changing landscape in Europe, which already has moved on since the marriage negotiations had started in 1539. So you've already got, the reasons for, making a political alliance, through Cleves to the Schmalkaldic League have already started to disappear because some cracks have formed between Francis I and Charles V. And I think Henry, also spiritually, is never really convinced by this alliance with German Lutherans. That's not where he sits spiritually. The six articles have been published the previous year which really reaffirm a traditional religious policy in England, way different to Cromwell's expectations for a Protestant Reformation. And yet Cromwell continues with the marriage negotiations. So all of this is really challenging for Anne, so what can we say about what she does, what happens? You know, we've got this famously. Henry will say later that, you know, he couldn't consummate the marriage. So there's very, there's physical, there's political, there's religious problems for Anne. What does she do in her short reign as queen? Is it all impossible for her or is there a chance that things can still go right?

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

I think there's more than a chance. And certainly I think we get a sense that Anne realises the heavy responsibility that's on her shoulders. Not so much from Henry VIII perspective, but for her native country, Cleves. There's a lot riding on this alliance, with her brother. And she wants to do the best by him and to make this marriage work. I would just say there's no small irony in the fact that when they are actually married, on the 6th of January at Greenwich, it's the most dazzling and the most public of all six weddings. And yet, of course, it will be the shortest marriage.

Well, Anne is making an effort. She's trying to learn English. She's very much tutored by the ladies who have been appointed to serve her and by Thomas Cromwell, who's desperate to make this new alliance work. So she's trying her best. We know about the wedding night and the nights that follow, and that Henry, is unable to consummate the marriage. And, of course, because we see it from his perspective, that's all Anne's fault, because, frankly, she's so physically repulsive to Henry that he can't bring himself to do it. And he's at pains to protest that it's her, not him, because he had two nocturnal pollutions, as he calls them. So really, you know, he doesn't have a problem, it's all about Anne just being too physically repulsive. And so then you get this, you know, the Privy Councilors, Thomas Cromwell getting involved in, in trying to manage what's going on in the marriage bed.

So Anne's getting tutored by her ladies and trying to make herself more appealing, we're told, to Henry VIII, but it must have been, you know, pretty awful for her. There's also a sense, if we believe the English accounts of the marriage bed, that Anne is hopelessly innocent. So there's a famous conversation that she has, I think, with the Duchess of Rutland who's quizzing Anne, really trying to get to know, has the marriage finally been consummated? And Anne says, ‘well, you know, I really think it has, because the king comes into my bed every, every night, and- and he calls me sweetheart, and he kisses me goodnight. And then he kisses me again in the morning before he leaves.’ And the Duchess is sort of a bit, nonplussed by this, and says, ‘well, is that all?’ And Anne says, ‘well yes. Isn't that enough?’ And and then the Duchess says, ‘well, we're going to need more than that, or we'll never have a Duke of York’. In other words, we'll never have a spare heir. So there's this sense of Anne's innocence, but I just wonder, is she that innocent? Then on the other hand, you know, there are rumours that, you know, Henry himself says there are signs that she's no maid, that, she has sort of various physical characteristics that suggest she's even born a child before. So there's these wildly varying accounts. I personally don't think Anne's quite as as naive as either she wanted to be portrayed or as she is portrayed. She's just doing her best to negotiate this incredibly difficult situation. But I think she realises quite early on this marriage is failing and it's failing quite badly.

**Brett Dolman** [00:32:47]

I'd like to know if we can say anything about her outside of the marriage bed, about what we know about this brief period of time when she's, the queen consort of Henry VIII?

**Tracy Borman** [00:32:59]

I am so pleased you ask that, because yeah, one of the things that I think is most admirable about Anne during this time is that she makes very sort of positive moves to be on good terms with all three of her stepchildren. So, the young Edward, admittedly, I mean he's still really just a very young infant. Elizabeth, the daughter of Anne Boleyn and Mary, the daughter of Katherine of Aragon. Now, it is quite hard to get on with all three of Henry's children in terms of the difference in their age, in their religious outlook, but Anne manages it. And in particular, she's very warm towards Elizabeth and I love her for this, because Elizabeth is an outcast since Anne Boleyn's fall from grace. Henry doesn't really have that much to do with her. And yet Elizabeth writes to Anne early in her marriage and Anne is so charmed by her that she says to have had her for a daughter would have been a greater happiness than being queen and they remain close. So this is more than just politics. This is more than just Anne making an effort because she's queen and she has to. This endures well beyond her marriage to Henry. What I also love about Anne and we hear this not just during her time as queen, but afterwards, is that she's very generous and she's very kind to those who serve her. I think that is a great judge of character. You know, it's all very well being nice to those, you know, above you on the ladder, but if you're nice to those below you, I think that speaks a great deal about your strength of character. And it's hard to find anyone who has a bad word to say about Anne of Cleves. She makes herself as charming as possible, as generous as possible to those who surround her at court.

**Brett Dolman** [00:35:04]

She's also trying to become English, essentially, and as far as she can, she is learning the language. She is adopting English fashions. We know this from the wardrobe accounts that are left behind. I think it's the French ambassador again who talks about her wearing new dresses every day. There is a problem of evidence when we're dealing with, Henry VIII's queens. The archives contain very few personal manuscripts by or about them. They are mostly, official or legal documents written for particular purposes and riddled with subjective opinion or gender bias or complete fabrications. Some of Anne's correspondence survives. We know that there was an exchange of portraits, for example, with Queen Marguerite of Navarre. She also gets involved in the negotiations around a projected engagements between Henry's daughter, Mary, and Philip of Bavaria. We have her ordering a bonnet for her stepson, Prince Edward, and her household accounts record payments for clothes, for shoes, for jewellery, for food, including Welsh leeks, trouts, quails and artichokes, for games of cards, for archery. Paying payments for the minstrels, for a puppet show for Prince Edward and for Anne's parrot, which we think was given to her by Lady De L'Isle on her way to England at Calais.

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

I love the fact that she had a parrot. And I love the fact I didn't know that, Brett. So thank you because I now hereafter will imagine Anne with her parrot. I wonder if she trained it to say anything nasty about Henry, but, we'll have to see.

**Brett Dolman** [00:36:45]

Yes, it adds colour and there was a life here that's going on, in and amongst the political and religious and personal problems of her marriage. And, you know, there is a possibility for these months that it can be made to work, I think, but ultimately it doesn't. And, and what is the final straw? What happens with the somebody floating around in the background who we haven't mentioned yet, who will maybe have a podcast all to herself?

**Tracy Borman** [00:37:12]

Indeed, the elephant in the room that is Catherine Howard appointed, as one of Anne's ladies and very much, I think, maneuvered into position by her powerful Howard family, the Duke of Norfolk in particular. And she's much more Henry's type. She's very, very young. She's attractive. And so, Anne is pretty soon conscious that she has this rival, if you like it. And I think it's Catherine Howard who gives Henry the real impetus to get out of what is a failing marriage. So, this is when Henry really starts to latch on to this idea. Well, more than an idea, as you've said Brett, there was this on off betrothal between Anne and the Duke of Lorraine's son. And this really becomes the focus of the annulment campaign, which Cromwell himself has to work on, even though he's very much for the marriage. And Anne herself, so I think it's fascinating to look at her reaction to all of this, so she knows her marriage is failed and I'm sure she, she feels a real burden from that, on behalf of her brother, because she knows the importance of this alliance. But she's also a pragmatist and she recognises the writing on the wall. Well, apparently, when she is first commanded to leave court in late June 1540 and shortly afterwards told of the annulment plans, there's one report that has Anne fainting. So, you know, she's so shocked by all of this, and is she shocked? I doubt it. But actually, a more interesting question is, is she frightened because she'll know the history of Henry's other three wives, and in particular, the other Anne, Anne Boleyn. And she might well have been pretty terrified about what was going to happen to her. Is this an annulment, or is Henry going to find some means to get rid of her rather more permanently? It was a very, very frightening and unsettling time for Anne, but she doesn't have to wait long. That's the only good to say about it, because she's told of the annulment plans on the 6th of July. And it's only six days after that that the annulment is issued, actually, from here, from Hampton Court. So, makes it another good reason to be staging our conversation here.

**Brett Dolman** [00:40:02]

So one way or another, the marriage is over. For a complicated set of reasons; personal, political, perhaps religious too. Anne has assented to this annulment on the 12th of July. What does she get out of this for acquiescing, even if she perhaps had any choice at all, over the terms of the separation?

**Tracy Borman** [00:40:24]

Anne actually does very well out of the annulment. She gets several properties, including Richmond Palace and Bletchingley. And later she'll inherit Hever Castle, of course, Anne Boleyn's family seat. She gets a generous financial settlement, two of about £20,000 a year. And as well, and this is valuable, it might not sound like it today, but it is at the time. She has the status of being the king's beloved sister. So she has a status that is superior to every woman in England except Henry's wife and daughters, which is quite something. And so she's welcome at court. She still has social standing. And really, this is a big reason for why I think, Anne is not just a survivor, but a success story. And I love her acquiescence actually, because it does feel like there's more than an element of choice in this for Anne. She could have held out longer against the annulment, but she has learned from the lessons of the past. She saw that Katherine of Aragon, who famously held out against an annulment for many years, died miserable and alone and many miles distant from court. Of course, she wants to avoid Anne Boleyn's fate as well. So she's pragmatic, and she makes the choice to go along, to acquiesce, to be amenable.

Well, this is the part of our conversation, Brett, that I really wanted to get to because it's life for Anne after Henry. And of all the six queens, it's most difficult to kind of extricate her story from Henry's for as long as she is his queen. But then there's a real sense for me of Anne coming into her own, really. We have hints of her personality and how she's going to spend her time before the annulment. But now there's this sense, I think, of a sort of blossoming, really, for Anne, of her really making the most of what she has. Now, of course, she's been honourably treated as queen, but in stark contrast to some of her predecessors, she continues to be honourably treated. She has this very generous allowance from Henry. I think there's a sense of of gratitude on his part. And actually he can now, like everybody else is doing, finally appreciate Anne's personality. She's very likeable. And Henry welcomes her to court, and Anne seems to enjoy the freedom of sometimes being at court, sometimes being at Richmond Palace or her other properties.

And she has greater freedom and greater wealth than the majority of other women in Tudor England. This is not an age that favours women, particularly women who are living independently of a man and yet, Anne has this quite heady freedom. She has a lot of privilege, but none of the responsibility of being married to Henry anymore and of having to give him an heir and uphold this alliance. And I think there is a sense of Anne really enjoying herself now. We know from her account book she's quite a spender. She likes to eat well, she likes to gamble, go hunting, she spends a lot of time with Elizabeth. She also sees Mary and Edward. But my favourite and one of the earliest, first appearances post annulment of Anne that we get is when she turns up for the Christmas celebrations at the end of the year, that had started with her marrying Henry. And you might imagine this is a bit awkward because Henry's now married again to Catherine Howard. So she's the queen and along comes the former queen. So surely that's going to be rather awkward, but it certainly doesn't seem to be any awkwardness on Anne's part. She actually dances with with Catherine Howard. And, you know, seems to be having a very, very good time at court, because she's now freed of this burden that she'd been carrying, admittedly, for quite a short time, but as Henry's queen.

**Brett Dolman** [00:45:03]

So, Anne is freed from this matrimonial burden of being married to Henry VIII, but like all women of this period, even those of her rank, her life is still circumscribed, and also because of her unique position as being a surviving ex-wife of Henry XIII, ex-queen. She has limitations forced on her. Her communications with her family in Cleves is monitored and censored. There are other things that she can't do. She stays in England, and she also does remain part of this political background. So whilst the Cleves and German Schmalkaldic alliance has disintegrated in terms of its usefulness for England, nonetheless, there are other reasons why Henry VIII is still interested in maintaining that relationship. And Anne becomes this conduit, really, for political negotiations between the two countries for at least the next 2 or 3 years, whilst that usefulness remains intact. And it's only until a little bit later, in fact, when England becomes allied with Charles V, in this ever-changing political world of European politics against France and against Cleves, so Anne's position becomes a bit more difficult and a bit more sidelined because her political usefulness evaporates for Henry. What do we know about what happens to Anne after Henry dies in 1547?

**Tracy Borman** [00:46:38]

Well, I think this is when we are really reminded that much as Anne has been enjoying relative freedom and wealth as well, that had been very much tied to a man, to Henry, and his successor. His precious son Edward is now on the throne and Anne's fate really, takes a bit of a nosedive because Edward's council, I should say, it's more his council than Edward himself, they seem to view Anne as a bit of a drain on resources. They're not so motivated to be generous as Henry had been. And so, pretty much immediately they confiscate two of Anne's manors, Richmond, Richmond Palace and Bletchingley. And she suffers now a degree of financial hardship. Things aren't as easy, as free as they had been in the wake of her marriage to Henry. Thankfully for Anne, Edward doesn't actually live very long as king. He dies after just six years on the throne. He's succeeded briefly by Lady Jane Grey, but then by his elder half-sister, Mary. And then there's an upturn in Anne's fortunes when there's a woman on the throne. And I love this, and I love the fact that Anne of Cleves, because she's just so likeable and she's so diplomatic, she's managed to stay in the good graces of both of her stepdaughters. And this now bears fruit, because Mary honours Anne with a prominent place in her coronation procession. And Anne actually shares a carriage with Elizabeth, who she's remained very close to.

Now it's not all plain sailing for Anne during Mary's reign, because Anne is actually suspected of involvement in the Wyatt rebellion early in Mary's reign. But there was no real evidence against her. And eventually she was, invited back, to court and Mary looks after her. She allows Anne to live at Chelsea, in the home once occupied by Katherine Parr, Henry's final queen. But by then, so we're talking sort of 1557, Anne's health has begun to falter. And in the middle of July 1557, so she's then in her early 40s, she dictates her will. I love the fact she includes a very generous bequest to her younger stepdaughter, Elizabeth, in that will. And she dies on the 16th of July, possibly of of cancer. And she's accorded a very rich, lavish burial by Mary. She's buried at Westminster Abbey. So that's a real privilege on the 3rd of August, 1557. And her tomb is very close to Edward the Confessor's shrine, so a very prominent part of the abbey. And I think it's a fitting tribute by Mary to a stepmother who she'd been very close to, who was well liked by pretty much everyone she met.

**Brett Dolman** [00:50:09]

So, your favourite of Henry VIII's queens. But before we go, maybe we should also place Anne in a wider context of what it meant to be someone in her position in the 16th century as a woman, as a high-status German princess living in a foreign country. Can we say something about Anne's experience within that wider context?

**Tracy Borman** [00:50:31]

I think we can. And there's a danger here in overstating how much freedom Anne had. But, she had more than most women. Certainly post her marriage to Henry, she'd, thanks to this annulment agreement, she'd been made wealthy, relatively independent, she was a senior member of the royal family. And really, really crucially, she didn't remarry and she didn't have children. So if you think of a woman's lot in Tudor England, you know, childbirth fraught with danger accounts for a high proportion of early deaths among women. But that was never going to be a risk for Anne.

**Brett Dolman** [00:51:19]

I mean, is it true, then, to say that actually the flip side of that is, is that she didn't have the freedom to ever get married or have children because she would not have been allowed?

**Tracy Borman** [00:51:27]

That's absolutely, possible. I mean, this is not a woman who can make too many choices of her own. She can enjoy the bounty that she has been given by Henry. But she can't return to Cleves. I can't imagine it would have been easy for her to remarry, even if she'd wished to. I like to think she didn't wish to. So there were constraints, but I do think she was still in a much stronger position than most of her female contemporaries. She did have wealth during Henry's lifetime. She had these properties, she could be mistress of every household that she lived in. Anne was so welcome at court, and actually so in favour with Henry, it was even rumoured he was contemplating remarrying her after Catherine Howard's demise. So that was just how highly thought of she truly was by everyone. That's what I love about Anne of Cleves. One of the many things, it's hard to find anyone saying a bad word about her, which is rare for anybody at the Tudor court. And she was remembered very warmly.

I think one of my favourite quotes about Anne is that, ‘she was a lady of right commendable regards, courteous, gentle, a good housekeeper, and very bountiful to her servants.’ So here was a woman who was not just liked, but loved widely by people at court, by those who worked for her, by her family back in Cleves, by her stepchildren, and of course, by me. And I've loved being able to just explore Anne's story, Anne's personality, her character separately from Henry. And I hope, Brett, that we have gone some way towards yet just unpicking this myth is what it's all about, because we talk about her in the context of Henry, but above all else in the context of her appearance. And that, for me, is the least interesting part of Anne and her story. It wasn't about her appearance. We have to consider Anne as as a woman, as a personality, but also in the context of her time, the political, religious landscape, we can't separate her from that. So to me, she's the most fascinating, actually, of the six queens and that's because of everything but her appearance.

**Brett Dolman** [00:54:17]

Well, thank you, Tracy, and thank you for letting me host your podcast this time around. And, I hope you enjoyed it as much as me.

**Tracy Borman** [00:54:24]

I really did. Thanks so much, Brett. And I now have a new respect for everyone who has been on this podcast and been grilled by me, because it's quite scary, but it's also very entertaining to be able to just wax lyrical about your favourite queen.

**Gareth Russell** [00:54:41]

[Gareth speaks from the studio. He has a warm voice and a Northern Irish accent.]

Thanks for listening to this episode. I'm Gareth Russell and next time I'll be joining Tracy to discuss Catherine Howard.

**Tracy Borman** [00:54:48]

[From the studio.]

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.]