

ANNE BOLEYN

ANNE
BOLEYN
FATAL ATTRACTIONS

G.W. BERNARD

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

Published with assistance from the foundation established in memory of
Oliver Baty Cunningham of the Class of 1917, Yale College.

Copyright © 2010 G.W. Bernard

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in any form
(beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law
and except by reviewers for the public press) without permission from the publishers.

For information about this and other Yale University Press publications, please
contact:

U.S. Office: sales.press@yale.edu www.yalebooks.com

Europe Office: sales@yaleup.co.uk www.yaleup.co.uk

Set in Sabon by IDSUK (DataConnection) Ltd

Printed in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bernard, G.W.

Anne Boleyn/George Bernard.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-300-16245-5 (cloth: alk. paper)

1. Anne Boleyn, Queen, consort of Henry VIII, King of England, 1507-1536.
2. Queens—England—Biography. 3. Great Britain—History—Henry VIII, 1509-1547—Biography. 4. Great Britain—Kings and rulers—Biography. 5. Henry VIII, King of England, 1491-1547—Marriage. I. Title.

DA333.B6B45 2010

942.05'2092—dc22

[B]

2009039203

A catalogue record is available for this book from the British Library

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> | vi |
| <i>Preface</i> | vii |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | ix |
| 1 ‘These bloody days have broken my heart’: the fall of Anne Boleyn | 1 |
| 2 Who was Anne Boleyn? | 4 |
| 3 ‘Whose pretty dukkys I trust shortly to kiss’: Henry VIII’s infatuation with Anne | 19 |
| 4 ‘The King’s Great Matter’: Henry’s divorce and Anne | 37 |
| 5 ‘The most happy’: King Henry and Queen Anne | 72 |
| 6 She ‘wore yellow for the mourning’: Anne against Catherine | 79 |
| 7 ‘I have done many good deeds in my life’: Anne Boleyn’s religion | 92 |
| 8 Anne’s miscarriage | 125 |
| 9 Conspiracy? | 135 |
| 10 ‘A much higher fault’: the countess of Worcester’s charge against Anne | 151 |
| 11 ‘You would look to have me’: Anne’s lovers? | 161 |
| 12 ‘Incontinent living so rank and common’: was Anne guilty? | 183 |
| <i>Epilogue</i> | 193 |
| <i>Appendix: The Portraits of Anne Boleyn</i> | 196 |
| <i>Notes</i> | 201 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 223 |
| <i>Index</i> | 230 |

PREFACE

Most of us acquire our first historical impressions at an early age from some vivid story or image. We learn about Alfred burning the cakes, for example, about the bloodthirsty and feuding medieval nobility, about the ignorance and immorality of the monks and clergy of the later Middle Ages—and about Bluff King Hal, about Henry VIII's lustful pursuit of a dazzling succession of court ladies. Such images are powerful, leaving a lasting impact. Many of us go on to read historical novels or watch historical films and plays, and acquire what seem clear and utterly persuasive views of the past. Many have come across Anne Boleyn in novels and films and have greatly enjoyed the ways in which their writers and directors have told her story.

But a professional historian—someone who studies and teaches history at university—will want to warn you that matters are not quite so straightforward. My interest in Anne Boleyn began in much the same way as anyone else's: I was intrigued by the remarkable and dramatic events that led to Henry VIII's break with Rome, by Anne's part in them, and then by her extraordinary downfall. But as a professional historian I wanted to test what I had been told. Those powerful images of Anne that we have seen in films or read in novels may well not be the whole story. On what are they based? How can we know that they are true?

Prompted by such curiosity, I set off on a voyage of discovery shared with you here. It may well be that the destination turns out to be rather different from that which you expect. Not the least of the challenges is

that there is rather less evidence surviving from the early sixteenth century than one would wish. I should emphasise that much must unavoidably remain uncertain. In Green Road, East Ham, just along from West Ham football stadium, the Boleyn ground, are the Boleyn pub, built in 1898, and the Boleyn cinema, built in 1938. They are called after Anne Boleyn because there was once (as illustrations show) a Tudor brick house with typical chimneys here. It was owned by Richard Breame, a minor servant of Henry VIII. And, so the story goes, this was one of the places which Henry visited when courting Anne. There is no surviving evidence to that effect; it is not impossible; but we lack anything like proof.

The greatest shortcoming of the surviving sources is that we are short of information about what people thought and why they did what they did. Consequently a good deal must be inferred from actions: a reasonable proceeding, but one to be undertaken carefully and openly. Historical playwrights, historical novelists and film directors are perfectly free to use their imaginations to fill in the enormous gaps in our knowledge, and if they do so to dramatic effect, that undoubtedly makes for good reading and viewing. But precisely because such representations can be powerful and make a deep impact, they risk embedding images that are at best fanciful and at worst downright false. My approach is rather to ask questions at every turn, always to show where our information comes from, whether from a letter written by Anne herself (though there are very few of those) or from a despatch by one of the foreign ambassadors in England (notably Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador from 1529), or from a near-contemporary narrative history (such as those of George Cavendish, sometime servant and then biographer of Thomas Wolsey, or of the martyrologist John Foxe) and to share with you my reasoning, and indeed my speculation, albeit I hope informed speculation, on matters on which the evidence alone is tantalisingly inconclusive or frustratingly absent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was in the middle of a class on the politics of Henry VIII's reign that it first occurred to me that Anne Boleyn might not have been entirely innocent of the adulteries of which she was accused. And many generations of students have since discussed and argued with me about Anne Boleyn's fate: I am greatly indebted to them. My late colleague T.B. Pugh supplied me with references and first encouraged me to go further. As I did so, in writing the articles in which I first sketched my claims (for permission to draw on which I thank Oxford Journals and Cambridge University Press) and more recently in preparing this biography, I benefited from the advice and the questioning of many friends, including Cliff Davies, the late Jennifer Loach, Penry Williams, Peter Gwyn, Jenny Wormald, Steve Gunn, Greg Walker, David Katz, the late Geoff Dickens, Rhys Robinson, Henry James, Wendy Toulson, Edward Wilson, Mark Stoyale, Janet Dickinson, Anne Curry and John Painter. Both Peter Gwyn and Mark Stoyale are due special thanks for undertaking the labour of reading and commenting on successive drafts. At Yale University Press, I specially wish to thank Robert Baldock, Tom Buhler and Beth Humphries. The British Academy and the University of Southampton financed research in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna: I am very grateful to the staff there for their most helpful assistance. An award by the Arts and Humanities Research Council doubled the study leave given me by my own university and so enabled me to complete this study.

'These bloody days have broken my heart'

THE FALL OF ANNE BOLEYN

On 30 April 1536 Mark Smeaton, a musician at Henry VIII's court, was arrested and interrogated. Maybe he was tortured. George Constantyne, himself suspected of treason when testifying three years later, declared that 'the saying was that he was first grievously racked', but immediately added the qualification, 'which I could never know of a truth'.¹ Tortured or not, Mark confessed that he had on three occasions made love to Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's queen. That, quite understandably, was enough to send him to the Tower. The arrests did not end there. Henry Norris, chief gentleman of Henry's privy chamber, the closest of the king's personal servants, was sent to join Smeaton in the Tower, after Henry VIII had personally interrogated him the following day. Anne Boleyn followed, after she had been interrogated by the king's council, together with her brother, George, Viscount Rochford. Several courtiers were sent there too: William Brereton and Sir Francis Weston, both gentlemen of the privy chamber, the poet Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Sir Richard Page, another courtier. Wyatt and Page were shortly set free. But Anne, her brother, Smeaton, Norris, Brereton and Weston were all indicted.

What had they done to deserve this treatment? Anne had allegedly seduced them by her conversation, gifts and kisses. For three years and more, Anne, 'despising her marriage' and 'entertaining malice against the king', had been 'following daily her frail and carnal lust'. 'By base conversations and kisses, touchings, gifts, and other infamous incitations',

Anne had led several of the king's close servants to be her 'adulterers and concubines'.

The indictment specified the charges. On 6 October 1533 and several days before and after, Anne, 'by sweet words, kisses, touches and otherwise', seduced Henry Norris to 'violate' her on 12 October 1533. They had illicit intercourse at various other times, both before and after, sometimes at his instigation, sometimes hers. On 2 November 1535, and several times before and after, Anne had incited her own brother, George, to have sex with her, 'alluring him with her tongue in his mouth and his in hers' and also by kisses, presents and jewels. George on 5 November 1535, and on several other days before and after, made love to his sister at Westminster, sometimes at his, sometimes at her, instigation, 'despising the commands of God and all human laws'. The indictments against William Brereton, Sir Francis Weston and Mark Smeaton were then set out in identical ways. On named dates, and on several days before and after, Anne had seduced them, and on specified dates between five days to a fortnight later, they had had sex, sometimes at Anne's instigation, sometimes at theirs: William Brereton in December 1533, Mark Smeaton in April 1534 and Sir Francis Weston in May 1534. In a parallel indictment the charges against these men were identical—but the dates given were somewhat different, in four cases a month later, in that of Brereton a month earlier.

In other words, having married Henry VIII in early 1533, Anne Boleyn had then allegedly had sexual relationships with Henry Norris in October or November 1533, with William Brereton in November or December 1533; with Mark Smeaton in April or May 1534; with Sir Francis Weston in May or June 1534; and with her brother in November and December 1535. Not surprisingly, the five men, 'inflamed with carnal love of the queen', became very jealous of each other, and gave her secret gifts and pledges. In turn the queen could not bear it when any of them talked to another woman, and encouraged them by giving them great gifts. On 31 October 1535 (or on 8 January 1536) the queen and the five men allegedly 'conspired the death and destruction of the king', Anne often saying that she would marry one of them as soon as the king died, and declaring that she would never love the king in her heart.² Such acts were regarded as treason, the greatest of crimes, for

which the penalty was death. Accordingly, first the commoners Norris, Smeaton, Weston and Brereton, and then on Monday 15 May Anne and her brother, were convicted and executed.

All of this was unprecedented. Not surprisingly it has given rise to heated debate. Many contemporaries were astonished. Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury, was 'clean amazed'.³ And many, indeed most, modern historians believe that all this is too preposterous for words. Following the martyrologist John Foxe, who thought the charges, not least that of incest with her brother, 'so contrary to nature that no natural man will believe it',⁴ they assert that Anne and her alleged lovers could not possibly have behaved like this.⁵ The only plausible explanation, such historians believe, is that they were framed, and so they elaborate complex theories about why and how that was done. But maybe that is too hasty a response. Was there rather more substance to the charges for which Anne and her friends paid with their lives?