

ANNE BOLEYN or, the Lion, the Witch and the [Great] Wardrobe

1. LIFE BEFORE HENRY

Anne Boleyn was a GREAT lady

a) The Boleyn family

Her parents

Sir Thomas Boleyn, Anne's father, was the son of Sir William Boleyn, and grandson of Geoffrey Boleyn, Alderman of London, who had died in 1463. However his mother, Margaret was the daughter and co-heir of Thomas Butler, Earl of Ormonde.

He was a man of talents and intelligence. With a great capacity for work. AS Eric Ives points out ...

From 1519-23 Thomas Boleyn was successively Henry VIII's Ambassador to the court of France – in attendance at the **Field of Cloth of Gold** and with the meeting at **Gravelines** with Charles V..took part in **Calais conference** and then **Ambassador to Spain**.

He was skilled in diplomacy and languages and in 1530 Henry VIII said that there was no negotiator as skilled as Thomas Boleyn.

He was a busy member of the Council.

Elizabeth Howard, Anne's mother, was the daughter of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey and later Duke of Norfolk.

So, although in one sense the Boleyns were a merchant family made good, on the female side they were **aristocrats of the first rank**.

Anne's membership of the extensive Howard kindred was to be of great importance to her career.

b) Childhood

The Boleyns came originally from Blickling in Norfolk although Geoffrey Boleyn had built Hever in Kent (and within easy reach of London).

It is almost certain that **Anne was born in Norfolk**.

The birth dates of the three Boleyn children who survived infancy, Mary, Anne and George, are not precisely known and have been much debated.

However Anne's biographer, Eric Ives, after weighing a lot of conflicting evidence, has come to the conclusion that

Mary was the eldest, born in 1499 or 1500;

Anne the second in 1501, and

George the youngest in 1504 or 1505.

Very little is known of Anne's childhood or education, but her mother was attached on an occasional basis to the **household of Catherine of Aragon after she became queen in 1509, so it is probable that both Mary and Anne** had been introduced to the court before they reached their twelfth birthdays.

At that time Sir Thomas was an Esquire of the Body, and a rising courtier, so it is likely that all the children were given a conventional aristocratic education - reading, writing, a little Latin, piety, needlecraft and household management for the girls; Latin literacy, some theology and classical history, riding and weapons skills for George. We do not know the names of any of their teachers.

c) Adolescence

In 1513, when she was about twelve, Anne was launched into the world. Her father, who was in high favour at the time, managed to secure for her a position as

Maid of Honour in the household of Margaret of Austria, the regent of the Low Countries for her thirteen year old nephew, Charles of Burgundy.. the future Emperor Charles V. Margaret was sister-in-law to Catherine of Aragon.

This was a great *coup* for Sir Thomas, because elite families all over Europe were competing to have their children trained in what was still regarded as the model of courtly environments.

Although the court of Burgundy was not quite the pace setter which it had been half a century before, it was still the place to learn the correct rituals of aristocratic behaviour; and Margaret was deliberately importing young people from various countries in order to give her principal charge a chance to learn the ways of others.

Thomas had been on a diplomatic mission to Mechelen in 1512, and had made a good impression on Regent Margaret; hence her willingness to accept his daughter as one of her eighteen *filles d'honneur*.

Anne had no specific duties, but worked under a tutor named Symonnet, learning mainly French and deportment - rather like the finishing schools of a later generation.

She was, however, expected to play a part in the ceremonies and entertainments of the court, and that was the steepest learning curve.

**A young lady was expected:
to dance skilfully,
to play at least one musical instrument,
to know how to make agreeable conversation in various kinds of company.
to learn the rules of courtly love.**

The most accurate description of this in modern parlance would be platonic flirting, but that would not do justice to either its subtlety or its importance. Margaret (who was an expert herself) was very insistent that the girls in her charge should play this game skilfully, and without in any way compromising their reputations.

Within a few months of her arrival in Mechelen , Anne was noticed as being particularly alert, particularly receptive, and potentially at least, particularly skilful.

d) France

In August 1514, Henry VIII was ending his war with France, and part of the deal was that his sister Mary (then aged 18) should break off her engagement to Charles of Burgundy and marry Louis XII.

Sir Thomas was forced to withdraw his younger daughter from Mechelen, in order that she might join the entourage being prepared for Mary.

It appears (and the evidence is not clear) that her elder sister, Mary, accompanied the new Queen from England, and that Anne joined them in Paris.

However, on 1st January 1515 Louis died. Henry sent his friend Charles Brandon to bring his sister home, and Mary secretly married him before they returned to England in April.

Mary Boleyn (who had acquired a somewhat dubious reputation in France) accompanied them;

but

Anne was transferred, by some means which are not known, to the household of Claude, the young queen of the new king, Francis I.

It appears that Claude, who was the same age as Anne, had taken a fancy to the young English girl, and the transfer was arranged at her request.

Anne remained with Claude for nearly seven years, and was later remembered for her vivacity, and her musical accomplishments.

There is no direct evidence for what she did during these years, but she became a Francophile, an expert courtier, and a coquette.

She almost certainly saw Leonardo da Vinci when the court was at Cloux

She certainly must have been familiar with Queen Claude's interest in books and illumination.

She may have accompanied Claude and Louise of Savoy to celebrate Francis' victory at Marignano and later when the Queen was crowned at St., Denis and made a spectacular entry to Paris in 1516.

She was almost certainly in attendance on Claude at the Field of Cloth of Gold

It was later said (as a compliment) that Francis's courtiers could not believe that she was not French.

She seems to have acted as an interpreter when Claude entertained English visitors, and particularly when the two courts mingled at the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520.

Anne also became friendly with Francis's sister, Marguerite d'Angoulême, and may have absorbed some of her unorthodox views.

Anne was, however, never in Marguerite's service and the evidence for the relationship is circumstantial.

However, after 1520 relations between England and France began to cool, and towards the end of 1521 Sir Thomas recalled his daughter from France.

By this time Anne was overdue for an advantageous marriage, and that seems to have been what her father had in mind.