Anne Boleyn

The Most Happy

BORN: c.1500?; MARRIED: JANUARY 1533; EXECUTED: 19 MAY 1536

*There has probably been more interest in the wives of Henry VIII than in the King himself, although it is impossible not to wonder about the man that brought these six women together in history. Their lives were all unique, yet all had fates ultimately decided by the same man. Two were divorced, with one getting a much better deal than the other. Two were beheaded, one falsely accused, the other probably not. One died shortly after giving birth to the male heir Henry so desperately longed for. One survived as his widow.*

**Anne's Appearance**

A quote from the Venetian Ambassador said she was 'not one of the handsomest women in the world...'. She was considered moderately pretty. But, one must consider what 'pretty' was in the 16th century. Anne was the opposite of the pale, blonde-haired, blue-eyed image of beauty. She had dark, olive-colored skin, thick dark brown hair and dark brown eyes which often appeared black.

**Life in England and the Attentions of the King**

Exactly when and where Henry VIII first noticed Anne is not known. It is likely that Henry sought to make Anne his mistress, as he had her sister Mary years before. Maybe drawing on the example of Elizabeth Woodville, Queen to Edward IV (and maternal grandmother to Henry VIII) who was said to have told King Edward that she would only be his wife, not his mistress, Anne denied Henry VIII sexual favors. We don't know who first had the idea marriage, but eventually it evolved into "Queen or nothing" for Anne. At first, the court probably thought that Anne would just end up as another one of Henry's mistresses. But, in 1527 we see that Henry began to seek an annulment of his marriage to Catherine, making him free to marry again.

King Henry's passion for Anne can be attested to in the love letters he wrote to her when she was away from court. Henry hated writing letters, and very few documents in his own hand survive. However, 17 love letters to Anne remain and are preserved in the Vatican library.

**The Rise of Anne Boleyn**

In 1528, Anne's emergence at Court began. When the court spent Christmas at Greenwich that year, Anne was lodged in nice apartments near those of the King. The legal debates on the marriage of Henry and Catherine of Aragon continued on. Anne was no doubt frustrated by the lack of progress. Her famous temper and tongue showed themselves at times in famous arguments between her and Henry for all the court to see. Anne feared that Henry might go back to Catherine if the marriage could not be annulled and Anne would have wasted time that she could have used to make an advantageous marriage.

Anne was not popular with the people of England. In this period, records show that Henry began to spend more and more on Anne, buying her clothes, jewelry, and things for her amusement such as playing cards and bows and arrows. The waiting continued and Anne's position continued to rise.

**Queen Anne**

Sometime near the end of 1532, Anne finally gave way and by December she was pregnant. To avoid any questions of the legitimacy of the child, Henry was forced into action. Sometime near St. Paul's Day (January 25) 1533, Anne and Henry were secretly married. Although the King's marriage to Catherine was not dissolved, in the King's mind it had never existed in the first place, so he was free to marry whomever he wanted. On May 23, the Archbishop officially proclaimed that the marriage of Henry and Catherine was invalid.

Plans for Anne's coronation began. In preparation, she had been brought by water from Greenwich to the Tower of London dressed in cloth of gold. On the 1st of June, she left the Tower in procession to Westminster Abbey, where she became a crowned and anointed Queen in a ceremony led by Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

By August, preparations were being made for the birth of Anne's child, which was sure to be a boy. Names were being chosen, with Edward and Henry the top choices. The proclamation of the child's birth had already been written with 'prince' used to refer to the child.

Anne took to her chamber, according to custom, on August 26, 1533 and on September 7, at about 3:00 in the afternoon, the Princess Elizabeth was born. Her christening service was scaled down, but still a pleasant affair. The princess' white christening robes can currently be seen on display at Sudeley Castle in England.

Anne now knew that it was imperative that she produce a son. By January of 1534, she was pregnant again, but the child was either miscarried or stillborn. In 1535, she was become pregnant again but miscarried by the end of January. The child was reported to have been a boy. The Queen was quite upset, and blamed the miscarriage on her state of mind after hearing that Henry had taken a fall in jousting. She had to have known at this point that her failure to produce a living male heir was a threat to her own life, especially since the King's fancy for one of her ladies-in-waiting, Jane Seymour, began to grow.

**The Fall of Anne Boleyn**

On April 30, 1536, Anne's musician and friend for several years, Mark Smeaton, was arrested and probably tortured into making 'revelations' about the Queen. Next, Sir Henry Norris was arrested and taken to the Tower of London. Then the Queen's own brother, George Boleyn, Lord Rochford was arrested.

On May 2, the Queen herself was arrested at Greenwich and was informed of the charges against her: adultery, incest and plotting to murder the King. She was then taken to the Tower by barge along the same path she had traveled to prepare for her coronation just three years earlier. In fact, she was lodged in the same rooms she had held on that occasion.

There were several more arrests. Sir Francis Weston and William Brereton were charged with adultery with the Queen. Sir Thomas Wyatt was also arrested, but later released. They were put on trial with Smeaton and Norris at Westminster Hall on May 12, 1536. The men were not allowed to defend themselves, as was the case in charges of treason. They were found guilty and received the required punishment: they were to be hanged at Tyburn, cut down while still living and then disemboweled and quartered.

On Monday the 15th, the Queen and her brother were put on trial at the Great Hall of the Tower of London. Anne conducted herself in a calm and dignified manner, denying all the charges against her. Her brother was tried next, with his own wife testifying against him. Even though the evidence against them was scant, they were both found guilty, with the sentence being read by their uncle, Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk. They were to be either burnt at the stake or beheaded, at the discretion of the King.

**The Executions**

On May 17, George Boleyn was executed on Tower Hill. The other four men condemned with the Queen had their sentences commuted with a simple beheading at the Tower with Lord Rochford. Anne knew that her time would soon come and started to become hysterical, her behavior swinging from great levity to body- wracking sobs. Interestingly, shortly before her execution on charges of adultery, the Queen's marriage to the King was dissolved and declared invalid. One would wonder then how she could have committed adultery if she had in fact never been married to the King, but this was overlooked, as were so many other lapses of logic in the charges against Anne.

They came for Anne on the morning of May 19. She made a short speech before kneeling at the block. Her ladies removed the headdress and tied a blindfold over her eyes. The swordsman cut off her head with one swift stroke. Anne's body and head were put into an arrow chest and buried in an unmarked grave in the Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula which adjoined the Tower Green. Her body was one that was identified in renovations of the chapel under the reign of Queen Victoria, so Anne's final resting place is now marked in the marble floor.