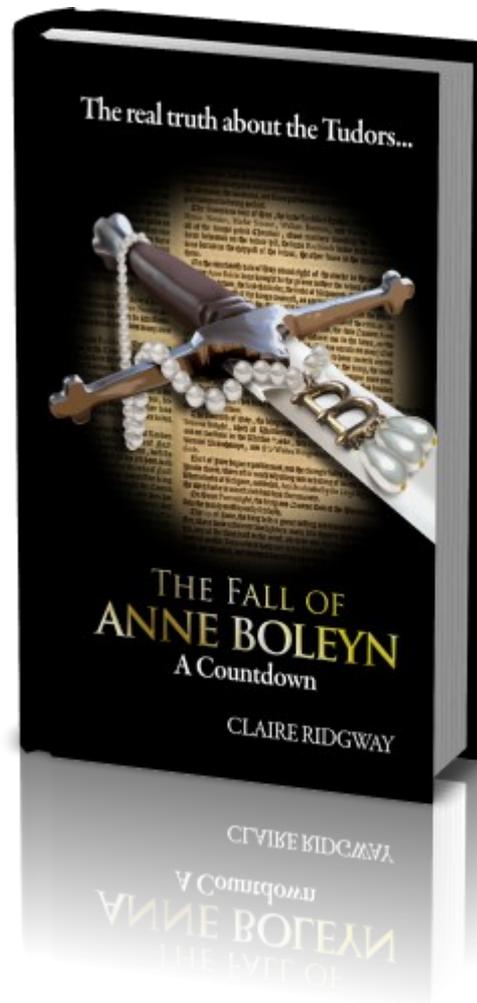


The Anne Boleyn Files Free Report

The following text is an extract from my book [The Fall of Anne Boleyn: A Countdown](#) which is available on Amazon as a Kindle e-book or a paperback. You can find book extras, such as an interactive timeline, at www.thefallofanneboleyn.com.



Who was Responsible for the Fall of Anne Boleyn?

I have been researching Anne Boleyn full-time for over three years now and this is still a question that gnaws at me, that keeps me awake at night and that quite literally drives me to distraction.

Through researching the primary sources I am confident that Anne Boleyn was innocent of the charges laid against her and that she died the victim of an awful miscarriage of justice, a victim of a brutal conspiracy. But who's to blame? Henry VIII? Thomas Cromwell? Jane Seymour? The Catholic conservatives? It just is not clear from the primary sources, and historians still argue over it today, all backing up their theories with solid evidence. It is frustrating and I don't believe it is something that we will ever have a definite answer to. All we can do is look at the primary sources, consider the arguments of the various Tudor experts and then come to our own conclusions.

On one side of the fence, we have historians such as Eric Ives and Alison Weir arguing that Thomas Cromwell was the instigator of the plot against Anne Boleyn and that he manipulated Henry VIII into believing that Anne was guilty. When I questioned, or rather grilled, Eric Ives on this subject last year, he commented that dominant men like Henry are often very malleable. So perhaps Cromwell simply preyed on the King's already paranoid and suspicious nature to make him believe

that it was possible that Anne had betrayed him in some way. When Smeaton confessed, it appeared that Henry VIII's suspicions had been proved true. Once the legal wheels were in motion, it would have been very difficult for Henry to have stopped it without looking foolish. Everything happened so quickly. In her book "The Lady in the Tower", Alison Weir goes as far as to paint Henry VIII as a victim of the coup, alongside Anne, the men and the little Elizabeth.¹

On the other side of the fence, we have historians like Derek Wilson and John Schofield who see Henry VIII as the prime mover in the events of 1536. Wilson writes of the illegal and "extremely cumbersome" means used in Anne's fall, which included extending the treason law in a rather "unwarranted" manner.² Wilson concludes that Cromwell would only have gone ahead with such a complicated plot because it was the King's will. Schofield agrees, painting Cromwell as Henry's loyal servant who had a duty to obey his King and to do his wishes.

I respect all of the historians concerned, and Ives, Wilson and Schofield are incredibly good at backing up their arguments with primary sources. When I read Ives, it seems natural to believe that it was all down to Cromwell, and then Schofield has me thinking that it was all down to Henry! The problem is that sources can be interpreted in different ways and even the people there at the time didn't seem to have known who was responsible, so how can we today? It's a conundrum and I don't believe that we can say anyone is right or wrong in their views.

Suspect 1 – Thomas Cromwell

Those who believe that Thomas Cromwell was the one ultimately responsible for Anne Boleyn's fall cite the following reasons:

Cromwell and Anne Disagreeing over the Dissolution of the Monasteries

In his book "The Religious Orders in England: Volume 3", David Knowles writes that Cromwell had decided how to act against the monasteries because he had been advised that "This good law duly put in execution would bring back to the Crown lands worth 40,000l. a year."³ This law, which Knowles explains was nothing new, was "not comprehensive enough" for Cromwell. His remembrances of February 1536 record "The abomination of religious persons throughout this realm, and a reformation to [be] devised therein".⁴ He then went on to draft a bill which was presented before the Commons for debate on 11th March. He also released the *Compendium Compertorum (Comperta)*, the reports of his commissioners, who had visited monasteries throughout the land in 1535 and early 1536 and found corruption, superstition and immorality. He hoped that these reports would enable him to get backing for his proposed reforms. Eric Ives⁵ quotes Hugh Latimer's recollection of the response to the commissioners' report, from a sermon preached before King Edward VI in 1549. Latimer said that "when their enormities were first read in the Parliament-house, they were so great and abominable, that there was nothing but "down with them"."⁶

As historian R W Hoyle points out, the suppression statute which resulted from the debates in Parliament "touched the smaller monasteries only", portraying them as houses that were ill-managed and full of immorality.⁷ These houses were to be dissolved, their members transferred to larger monasteries and their lands given to the King. Were the smaller monasteries the only ones that were corrupt? Of course not, so the Act of Suppression may have been more about funds than reform.

Anne Boleyn's almoner, John Skip, preached a sermon on Passion Sunday, 2nd April 1536, in which he claimed that "men" were rebuking the clergy "because they would have from the clergy their possessions." This was surely a reference to the reforms which Cromwell was pushing through Parliament. Skip went on to refer to the story of Esther, wife of King Ahasuerus. The King was deceived into ordering a massacre of his Jewish subjects by his adviser, Haman. Hower, "a good woman" whom the King loved and trusted, i.e. Esther, gave him different advice, stopped the

massacre, and saved the Jews. Haman was hanged as a result. This sermon, which must have had Anne Boleyn's approval, was an attack on Cromwell and the advice he was giving the King. Anne was all for reforming the monasteries but only where needed. Moreover, she believed that the money should be used for educational and charitable causes. Skip referred to this, talking about "the great decay of the universities in this realm and how necessary the maintenance of them is for the continuance of Christ's faith and his religion."⁸

But Anne and Skip were not the only ones to disagree with Cromwell's plans for the monasteries. Reformers and humanists Robert Barnes and Thomas Starkey also wanted the money put to better use, yet Cromwell did not bring them down. John Skip also survived Anne's fall. Schofield⁹ also points out that Cromwell was also working on a new act for poor relief, so he too was concerned with charity. It can also be said that Skip's attack may have been aimed at the King's council, not just Cromwell. When Skip was interrogated about his sermon the Esther-Haman reference was not mentioned.¹⁰

Anne Boleyn Had Threatened Cromwell

Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador, recorded on the 5th June 1535 something Cromwell told him, "the Lady [Anne] telling him, among other things, that she would like to see his head off his shoulders."¹¹ Cromwell had seen Cardinal Wolsey fall, partly as a result of Anne Boleyn's influence over the King, so some historians argue that Cromwell needed to get rid of Anne before she could bring him down.

However, historians such as John Schofield, point out that Anne's threat was made back in 1535 and that Cromwell had shrugged it off, saying "I trust so much on my master, that I fancy she cannot do me any harm".¹² Chapuys was also sceptical, wondering if the threat was actually "an invention of Cromwell". We also know that Anne lashed out at people and said things in anger. For example, she said that she would "bring down the pride of this unbridled Spanish blood",¹³ in reference to Mary, and that "she wished all the Spaniards in the world were in the sea".¹⁴ These were empty threats borne out of frustration. Furthermore, Cromwell had no need to bring Anne down when he could just wait for the Conservatives and Henry VIII to do it for him. By spring 1536, Anne was losing her influence over the King anyway and wasn't so much of a threat as she had been in Wolsey's time.

Cromwell Took Responsibility for Anne's Fall

Cromwell boasted that he was responsible for the coup against the Boleyns. In a letter to the Emperor dated 6th June 1536, Chapuys related a conversation he had had with Cromwell in which Cromwell had said that "it was he who, in consequence of the disappointment and anger he had felt on hearing the King's answer to me on the third day of Easter, had planned and brought about the whole affair."¹⁵ Chapuys credited Cromwell's claim about being responsible for the plot; he was an experienced ambassador who had had many dealings with Cromwell. He did not doubt that Cromwell was to blame.

However, John Schofield points out that in the part of the sentence before Cromwell said that "he had planned and brought about the whole affair, he also said that he had been "authorised and commissioned by the king to prosecute and bring to an end the mistress's trial".¹⁶ Cromwell's plotting was due to orders from Henry and not of his own volition. Greg Walker puts forward the argument that Cromwell simply investigated the allegations made against Anne, rather than being the one to initiate them.¹⁷ Cromwell reacted to events rather than causing them, but may have wished to come across as "a clever Machiavell" to Chapuys, rather than a minister who had not spotted the Queen's immoral behaviour.

Two Birds With One Stone

As well as Anne, who had become a thorn in his side regarding foreign policy, Cromwell wanted to remove powerful and influential men who were affecting his own standing with the King. Sir Henry Norris was one of the King's closest friends and, as Groom of the Stool, had considerable influence over the King, and Sir William Brereton was causing problems for Cromwell in Wales. Eric Ives points out that Brereton reigned supreme in North Wales and Cheshire, having “a virtual monopoly” of royal appointments made in the region,¹⁸ and that he used his authority there to push his own agenda. Brereton had had run-ins with Bishop Rowland Lee, Cromwell's representative there, and he was obviously going to be a fly in the ointment for Cromwell's planned reforms in the Welsh borders. Brereton was also a corrupt character, having caused the hanging of John ap Griffith Eyton in 1534 after Eyton had been acquitted for causing the death of one of Brereton's retainers by the Star Chamber.

In bringing down Anne for adultery, Cromwell could get rid of Brereton and Norris too.

Cromwell and the Catholic Conservatives

As Cromwell began to work with Chapuys for a reconciliation between Henry VIII and the Emperor, and the restoration of Mary, he came to some kind of agreement with the Catholic conservatives. This group consisted of the Seymours, Sir Nicholas Carew, the Marquis and Marchioness of Exeter, the Countess of Kildare and Baron Montagu. In April 1536, Chapuys¹⁹ reported that the Conservatives had heard, probably from Cromwell himself, of a breach between Anne and Cromwell. They had also heard that Cromwell had been asked by the King to give up his lodgings to Edward Seymour and his wife so that he could visit Edward's sister, Jane, without being seen. I agree with Ives²⁰ that Chapuys probably brought Cromwell and the Conservatives together when it became apparent that they were both working towards the same purpose.

At the end of the day, Cromwell was a pragmatist. He could see that Anne was going down and could easily take him with her if he didn't join the other side. After Anne's fall, he then worked to free himself from the conservative faction by implicating them in plots concerning Mary.

Cromwell Gained from the Coup

Not only did Cromwell get rid of Anne, her brother, Brereton and Norris, he also gained financially and in prestige. He succeeded to Lord Privy Seal in July 1536, after Thomas Boleyn surrendered it, gained a stewardship from the fall of George Boleyn and the abbey of Lesnes from Brereton for his servant, Ralph Sadler.

Mark Smeaton's Arrest

On 30th April 1536. Mark Smeaton, a court musician and a member of the Boleyn circle, was apprehended and taken to Thomas Cromwell's house in Stepney. Not to the Tower of London, but to Cromwell's own home. According to The Spanish Chronicle, which has to be taken with a large pinch of salt, Cromwell “called two stout young fellows of his, and asked for a rope and a cudgel, and ordered them to put the rope, which was full of knots, round Mark's head, and twisted it with the cudgel until Mark cried out, “Sir Secretary, no more, I will tell the truth, ” and then he said, “The Queen gave me the money. ” “Ah, Mark, ” said Cromwell, “I know the Queen gave you a hundred nobles, but what you have bought has cost over a thousand, and that is a great gift even for a Queen to a servant of low degree such as you. If you do not tell me all the truth I swear by the life of the King I will torture you till you do.” Mark replied, “Sir, I tell you truly that she gave it to me”. Then Cromwell ordered him a few more twists of the cord, and poor Mark, overcome by the torment, cried out, “No more, Sir, I will tell you everything that has happened”. And then he confessed all, and told everything as we have related it, and how it came to pass.”²¹

George Constantine, Sir Henry Norris's servant, wrote of how he'd heard that Smeaton was "grevously racked",²² although he didn't know if it was true. Whatever the truth of the matter, the fact that Smeaton was taken to Cromwell's home shows Cromwell's personal involvement in what was going on, although Greg Walker points out that Cromwell may have simply been acting on allegations made against Smeaton and Anne.

He Kept People Away from the King

Men like Archbishop Cranmer, who may have been able to talk the King around, were barred from seeing the King. Cranmer, who was at his country home in Kent, was called back to Lambeth but it was made plain that he should not try to see the King. Instead, he had to write to the King and try to defend Anne that way, although his letter cannot be seen as much of a defence and was tempered by an added postscript after his meeting with the Star Chamber.

It appears that George Boleyn may have travelled from Greenwich to Whitehall in an attempt to see the King, but was arrested and thrown in the Tower instead. The same is true of Anne's friends Sir Richard Page and Sir Thomas Wyatt, men who may have spoken up for her, given the chance.

Suspect 2 – King Henry VIII

The next suspect is the King himself and those who believe he was ultimately responsible cite the following reasons:

The King was the Master and Cromwell was His Servant

Historian Robert Hutchinson²³ writes that it was natural that Henry VIII would turn to his minister to remove his unwanted second wife. Cromwell would not have dared to risk his life by moving against the Queen without the King's blessing; he was simply there to do the King's bidding. In a letter to Stephen Gardiner and John Wallop in Paris, Cromwell referred to "the King's proceeding", rather than to "my plan".²⁴

It was Henry VIII who signed the death warrants and who stood by as his wife went to her death. Historian Derek Wilson writes of how Henry VIII behaved in his usual manner, giving orders to his ministers and then "retiring into the shadows" so that he could feign surprise when presented with the evidence against Anne.²⁵

The King Wanted to Take a Third Wife

Chapuis had reported that after Anne's miscarriage in January 1536, the King had told one of his principal courtiers in secret "that he had been seduced and forced into this second marriage by means of sortileges and charms, and that, owing to that, he held it as nul. God (he said) had well shown his displeasure at it by denying him male children. He, therefore, considered that he could take a third wife, which he said he wished much to do."²⁶ Chapuis also reported that after Catherine of Aragon's death, Anne had "cried and lamented...fearing lest she herself might be brought to the same end".²⁷

However, historians like Eric Ives believe that there is no evidence that Henry was looking to replace Anne. He was still referring to Anne as his "most dear and most entirely beloved wife the Queen" and writing of his hope for "heirs male" as late as 25th April 1536.²⁸ He was also still pushing for Anne to be recognised by Europe as his rightful wife and Queen. As we've heard, he even tricked Chapuis into recognising Anne as Queen, by bowing to her, on 18th April 1536. Why bother if he was about to replace her with Jane?

Henry and Anne were due to leave for Rochester, en route to Calais, on 2nd May, the day after the May Day jousting, but this was not cancelled until 11pm on Sunday 30th April, after the arrest of

Mark Smeaton. Surely, if Henry had ordered Anne's fall then he would not have planned this trip?

The King's Behaviour

Chapuys wrote that "the King has shown himself more glad than ever since the arrest of the Concubine, for he has been going about banqueting with ladies, sometimes remaining after midnight, and returning by the river" and that "He supped lately with several ladies in the house of the bishop of Carlisle, and showed an extravagant joy".²⁹ Chapuys thought this behaviour was odd and was rather cynical, commenting that "You never saw prince nor man who made greater show of his [cuckold's] horns or bore them more pleasantly. I leave you to imagine the cause."³⁰ Henry VIII was devastated in 1541 when Catherine Howard betrayed him, weeping in front of his privy council when he found out the truth about her. Chapuys commented then that "this king has wonderfully felt the case of the Queen, his wife, and that he has certainly shown greater sorrow and regret at her loss than at the faults, loss, or divorce of his preceding wives", going on to say "In fact, I should say that this king's case resembles very much that of the woman who cried more bitterly at the loss of her tenth husband than she had cried on the death of the other nine put together, though all of them had been equally worthy people and good husbands to her: the reason being that she had never buried one of them without being sure of the next, but that after the tenth husband she had no other one in view, hence her sorrow and her lamentations. Such is the case with the King, who, however, up to this day does not seem to have any plan or female friend to fall back upon."³¹ Henry showed no surprise, shock or upset at the investigation into Anne or at her fall.

Henry VIII also became betrothed to Jane Seymour on 20th May, the day after Anne Boleyn's execution, and then married her on 30th May. This ruthless and rather unseemly behaviour does suggest that his love for Anne had dwindled long before her death and that he had been planning marriage to Jane for some time. Of course, you could equally say that the paranoid King was manipulated by Cromwell into believing that Anne was guilty and so felt that she deserved everything that she got; and that Cromwell and the Seymours had been working on him for a while.

Henry's Stamp

John Schofield³² believes Henry's involvement is proven by the lack of logic in Anne being condemned for adultery even though Henry's marriage to Anne was annulled. Cromwell, as a lawyer, would have wanted a logical, "watertight case", yet the case against Anne made no sense. The blackening of Anne's name and the complexity of the plot bear the stamp of a husband who wanted his wife dead. The plot was down to emotions such as jealousy, fear, resentment and hatred, not Cromwell's rational and legal brain.³³ It would have been far easier for Cromwell to annul the marriage and send Anne to a nunnery. Instead, he had to build a very complicated and nonsensical case.

Henry Involved Himself in the Proceedings at the Start

After receiving news of Mark Smeaton's confession, Henry chose to question Sir Henry Norris on their ride to Whitehall from the May Day joust, offering Norris a pardon if he would confess.

Revenge

Anne and George Boleyn had, allegedly, ridiculed Henry VIII's clothes and his ballads, and had also discussed his sexual problems. George had even joked that Elizabeth may not be Henry's daughter. Their fall could, therefore, be seen as Henry VIII's ultimate revenge. It could also be said that Anne had made a fool of Henry and let him down. He had abandoned his wife of over twenty years for her, broken with his beloved Church, executed former friends and advisers, all to be with Anne and

yet she had failed to provide him with a son.

The Gossip

John Hill of Eynsham in Oxfordshire got into trouble for saying “that the King caused Mr. Norryes, Mr. Weston, and such as were put of late unto execution, for to be put to death only of pleasure” and “that the King, for a frawde and a gille, caused Master Norryes, Mr. Weston, and the other Queen to be put to death because he was made sure unto the Queen's grace that now is half a year before.”³⁴ So, the gossip spreading around England was that the King had got rid of Anne and the men so that he could marry Jane. Chapuys had noted on the day of Henry and Jane's betrothal that “everybody begins already to murmur by suspicion, and several affirm that long before the death of the other there was some arrangement which sounds ill in the ears of the people”.³⁵

Henry's Own Words

Henry later warned Jane Seymour against becoming involved in matters to do with the Kingdom. It was reported that “he had often told her not to meddle with his affairs, referring to the late Queen, which was enough to frighten a woman who is not very secure.”³⁶ In 1546, when the Conservatives were trying to bring down Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, Henry warned Cranmer that “false knaves” could be “procured” to stand as witnesses against him and to bring about his condemnation.³⁷ It was obviously the done thing!

Suspect 3 – Jane Seymour and the Catholic Conservatives

Some believe that Jane Seymour and the Catholic conservative faction who supported the Lady Mary hold some of the responsibility for Anne Boleyn's fall.

In April 1536, Chapuys reported to Charles V that Jane Seymour was being coached by Sir Nicholas Carew in how to behave towards the King, and that she was also being “advised to tell the King boldly how his marriage is detested by the people, and none consider it lawful”.³⁸ Carew, Courtenay, Montagu and the other Conservatives were evidently hoping that Jane would be the next Anne and that Henry's new flame could be used to bring down the Queen they detested so much. This would pave the way for the restoration of Lady Mary to the succession. The martyrologist, John Foxe, in his “Book of Martyrs”, put the King's “assent” to the events of 1536 down to “crafty setters-on”³⁹ who turned him against his wife and made him disinherit his daughter.

Some say that Jane had learned from Anne's example in her courtship with Henry. When Henry VIII sent Jane a purse full of sovereigns, she sent it back to him with a message saying “that she had no greater riches in the world than her honor, which she would not injure for a thousand deaths” and that if the King wanted to send her gifts then she begged him to do so after she was married. Like Anne before her, Jane was holding out for marriage, perhaps in the hope that Henry would warm to the thrill of the chase. However, this could also have been Jane's natural behaviour. She did appear to be a genuinely humble, virtuous and chaste young woman. Whatever her family and the Conservatives were planning, Jane may not have been a willing participant, and, at the end of the day, she was simply a woman, a chattel and pawn.

Suspect 4 - Anne Boleyn

I've heard it said that Anne Boleyn has to take some responsibility for her fall in 1536 even though she was innocent of the crimes for which she was condemned. In his TV series on Henry VIII, “Henry VIII: Mind of a Tyrant”,⁴⁰ David Starkey spoke about how Anne's forthright character and ability to say “no” to Henry, when nobody else would, were attractive in a mistress but not what Henry found acceptable in a wife. By 1536, it is said, Henry could no longer tolerate Anne's nagging, her hot temper and her jealousy. One documentary, “Days that Shook the World:

Execution of Anne Boleyn”,⁴¹ goes as far as to say that there were two reasons for Anne's fall: her refusal to “curb” her “bold manners” and her inability to provide Henry with the longed-for son and heir. However, how could Anne change? Henry had married her for love. He had been attracted to the feisty Anne, a woman who was willing to stand up to him and who was outspoken, if Anne changed her ways then she wouldn't be the woman he'd fallen in love with. It was an impossible situation – become the submissive wife, and lose what attracted Henry in the first place, or stay the same and risk annoying the King and making enemies.

We know that Anne and Henry's marriage was volatile and that the couple argued regularly but even Chapuys put this down to “lovers' quarrels, to which we must not attach too great importance”.⁴² It was a marriage based on love and passion, a real marriage rather than an arranged or diplomatic one, so it was bound to have its up and downs. Anne's jealousy, which is also sometimes seen as a factor in her fall, was a natural result of this love match. Anne had been a lady-in-waiting when she had caught Henry's eye, so how could she be sure that one of her ladies or another lady at court wouldn't steal Henry away from her? Whereas Catherine of Aragon had been able to turn a blind eye because she had a royal family and Emperor behind her, Anne could not. Anne had to fight for her marriage, she had to keep Henry interested. Although some historians, for example Alison Weir,⁴³ write of the marriage being in trouble from the start, there is no evidence of that. George Wyatt wrote that the royal couple “lived and loved, tokens of increasing love perpetually increasing between them. Her mind brought him forth the rich treasures of love of piety, love of truth, love of learning. Her body yielded him the fruits of marriage, inestimable pledges of her faith and loyal love”⁴⁴ and they were often described as being “merry”. Volatile, yes, unhappy, no. Passionate rows, but equally passionate making up.

As Eric Ives and Greg Walker have pointed out, the Queen's household was an “arena” for the courtly love tradition which Anne had learned in the household of Margaret of Austria. The courtly love tradition was a chivalric game where a courtier would choose a “mistress” to woo with poems, songs and gifts. It wasn't about sex, or even having a proper relationship, it was about chivalry and flirtation – a platonic relationship.⁴⁵ Courtiers were expected to sigh over the Queen and praise her beauty, it was all part of the game. Unfortunately, courtly love seems to have got out of hand in the case of Anne Boleyn and also became twisted to bring her down.

Mark Smeaton's mooning over Anne was used to force a confession, and her unthinking snub of him may have led him to hit back at her. Anne's reckless words to Norris regarding him looking for “dead men's shoes” were twisted to be evidence of a conspiracy to murder the King and Anne's ramblings in the Tower regarding Weston incriminated him and led to his execution. What started out as harmless courtly love and flirtation ended in six brutal deaths. Some blame Anne for allowing it to go on. Yes, her mention of “dead men's shoes” was reckless, but she was reprimanding Norris, not encouraging him; she was reminding him that she was taken. She may have mentioned the King's death, but it was unintentional and could in no way be seen as encouraging Norris to conspire with her. Anne panicked, realising that these words could be used against her, and went into “damage control” mode, ordering Norris to go to her almoner, John Skip, and swear that she “was a good woman”. It also appears that she tried to explain herself to her husband, an argument which Scottish theologian, Alexander Alesius, witnessed. Gossip spread like wildfire at the Tudor court and it is easy to imagine Henry VIII getting wind of Anne and Norris's altercation. Anne was probably trying to explain herself, but perhaps someone beat her to it and gave the story a bit of a twist. As far as Sir Francis Weston was concerned, Anne had spoken to him about “Mistress Shelton”, accusing him of loving her rather than his wife, “and he made answer to her again that he loved one in her house better than both. And the queen said, 'Who is that? ' . ' It is yourself ' .” Surely, he was simply playing the chivalrous knight of courtly love, here, and flattering his queen.

Greg Walker⁴⁶ writes of how it was “unguarded speech and gossip”, rather than adultery or incest, that condemned Anne Boleyn, quoting the words of Anne's aunt, Lady Boleyn, who attended Anne in those final days in the Tower: “such desire as you have ha[d to such tales] has brought you to this”.⁴⁷ We cannot know what Lady Boleyn was referring to. It may have been the courtly love

tradition, or it may have been Anne and her brother, George, laughing at the King's ballads, mocking his dress and discussing his sexual inadequacies – definitely unguarded speech, and words that could easily have turned Henry's love for his wife into bitter resentment and hate. Anne had allowed inappropriate talk and behaviour in her household, she had been reckless and disrespectful regarding the King, and she had let her tongue run away with her in the Tower. Regardless, that's a far cry from being guilty of incest and murder. Anne had provided Henry and Cromwell with ammunition, but she didn't give them the gun.

Historian Retha Warnicke gives another reason for Anne's downfall. Warnicke writes that “the sole reason”⁴⁸ for the King turning against his wife was her miscarriage of a monstrously deformed foetus in January 1536. Warnicke believes that this deformed foetus would have been seen as evidence of witchcraft and unnatural sexual acts, acts which the King would obviously not have been involved in. Warnicke cites Nicholas Sander, a Catholic recusant writing in Elizabeth I's reign, as the source to back up the deformed foetus story. Sander wrote of Anne miscarrying “a shapeless mass of flesh”, but he is the only source to say that and he wasn't even a contemporary of Anne's. The chronicler Charles Wriothesley recorded that Anne had miscarried a “man child” and that Anne “said that she had reckoned herself at that time but 15 weeks gone with child”⁴⁹ and Chapuys backed that up, writing that Anne miscarried “a male child which she had not borne 3½ months”.⁵⁰ It beggars belief that the deformed foetus would not have been mentioned at Anne's trial, as evidence of sexual sin, if Anne had really miscarried such a foetus.

Anne's miscarriage may have been a factor in her fall, in that it made her vulnerable and may have caused an already paranoid King to doubt his marriage, but it was not the one and only cause.

I have read claims online that Anne Boleyn was a victim of a Papal conspiracy. This is similar to a storyline in “The Tudors” when William Brereton, who is actually a Jesuit priest in the series, is hired to assassinate Anne and then gives his life to bring her down by confessing to adultery with her. There is no truth to this story, or to those which claim that the Papacy caused Anne's miscarriages by poisoning her. However, Anne's religious views would have made her unpopular with the Catholic conservatives at court, people who were just waiting for an opportunity to get rid of her.

Of course, there are those who believe that there is no smoke without a fire and that Anne may have been guilty of at least some of the crimes she was alleged to have committed. Possible reasons include desperation to provide the King with a son, jealousy at Henry's infidelity or just simple lust. However, there would have been no point in providing the King with a son who looked just like one of his courtiers; and would the intelligent Anne have really risked her position and marriage for a roll in the hay? No. Anne's guilt was a foregone conclusion, with her household being broken up and the executioner being ordered in advance of her trial. Anne was no saint, but I find it hard to believe that she was guilty.

A Combination

Some people may consider this sitting on the fence, but I choose to believe that Anne's fall was not down to just one person. In my opinion, there were a number of people who had a hand in it. Pamela Kaputska, on The Anne Boleyn Files Facebook page, describes Cromwell, Henry VIII and the Seymour faction as all coming together to form “the perfect storm” and I think that's spot on.

Ultimately, I believe that the buck has to stop with Henry as he was the one in control. In my opinion, he wanted rid of Anne because he had convinced himself that their marriage, like his previous marriage, was contrary to God's laws and that God was showing him this by not blessing him with a son and heir.

Henry wanted to move on to Jane Seymour, who was of fertile stock, and to have another chance at having a son and happiness. He had tired of Anne, who was too much work, and he felt that she had let him down. He had moved heaven and earth to be with her and she hadn't lived up to her promise.

The miscarriage of January 1536 proved to Henry that the marriage just wasn't right; it made his doubts very real. By April 1536, he was open to the Seymours and Catholic conservatives feeding his paranoia, convincing him that the English people were against Anne. He came to believe that everything was all Anne's fault, that he had fallen under her spell and made a huge mistake, so he ordered Cromwell to use the law to extricate him from his marriage to Anne. Henry was the one who made the decision and Cromwell was his servant, the man who provided his master with the machinery to exercise his will. Cromwell was to blame for bringing Anne down so brutally, and for getting the five men involved, but Henry was the one who started it all and the Seymours influenced Henry and took advantage of his vulnerability and anxiety.

I agree with Derek Wilson that the plot against Anne and the men was too complex to be down to Cromwell alone; if this were the case, there would certainly have been easier ways of ending the marriage. Adultery and incest were not even treason, so Anne and the men also had to be charged with conspiring against the King. Why would Cromwell have even bothered to accuse Anne of a charge that wouldn't lead to her death? The charges of adultery and treason were levied in order to blacken Anne's name completely, and they were the result of love turned to hate, the need to annihilate Anne entirely – they were Henry's idea and Cromwell had to make them work. If the adultery and incest bore Henry's mark, the legal machinery and the falls of Norris and Brereton bore Cromwell's.

From Claire

I hope you have enjoyed this extract from *The Fall of Anne Boleyn: A Countdown* and that you enjoy using *The Anne Boleyn Files* website.

- 1 Weir, *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 323.
- 2 Wilson, *A Brief History of Henry VIII: Reformer and Tyrant*.
- 3 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10 - January-June 1536," note 242.
- 4 *Ibid.*, note 254.
- 5 Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 309.
- 6 Corrie, *Sermons by Hugh Latimer*, 123.
- 7 Hoyle, "The Origins of the Dissolution of the Monasteries," 296.
- 8 "SP6/1 Folio 8 Sermon Preached by John Skip in the King's Chapel on Passion Sunday 1536."
- 9 Schofield, *The Rise and Fall of Thomas Cromwell: Henry VIII's Most Faithful Servant*, 103.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 114.
- 11 "Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 5 Part 1: 1534-1535," note 170.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 7," note 296.
- 14 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 5: 1531-1532," note 24.
- 15 "Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 5 Part 2: 1536-1538," note 61.
- 16 *Ibid.*, note 137.
- 17 Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 9.
- 18 Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 347.
- 19 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10 - January-June 1536," note 601.
- 20 Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 317.
- 21 Hume, *Chronicle of King Henry VIII. of England*, 61.
- 22 George Constantine, *Archaeologia, or, Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity*, 23:64.
- 23 Hutchinson, *Thomas Cromwell: The Rise and Fall of Henry VIII's Most Notorious Minister*, 85.
- 24 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10 - January-June 1536," note 873.
- 25 Wilson, *In the Lion's Court: Power, Ambition and Sudden Death in the Reign of Henry VIII*, 389.
- 26 "Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 5 Part 2: 1536-1538," note 59.
- 27 *Ibid.*, note 13.
- 28 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10 - January-June 1536," note 725.
- 29 *Ibid.*, note 908.
- 30 *Ibid.*, note 909.
- 31 "Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 6 Part 1: 1538-1542," note 211.
- 32 Schofield, *The Rise and Fall of Thomas Cromwell: Henry VIII's Most Faithful Servant*, 127.
- 33 Wilson, *A Brief History of Henry VIII: Reformer and Tyrant*.
- 34 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10 - January-June 1536," note 1205.
- 35 *Ibid.*, note 926.
- 36 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 11: July-December 1536," note 860.
- 37 *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation, Chiefly from the Manuscripts of John Foxe the Martyrologist; with Two Contemporary Biographies of Archbishop Cranmer*, 255.
- 38 "Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 5 Part 2: 1536-1538," note 43.
- 39 Fox (Fexe), *Fox's Book of Martyrs: Acts and Monuments of the Church in Three Volumes*, II:407.
- 40 Starkey, "Henry VIII: Mind of a Tyrant."
- 41 Cheadle, "Days That Shook the World: Execution of Anne Boleyn."
- 42 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 6 - 1533," note 1069.
- 43 Weir, *The Lady in the Tower: The Fall of Anne Boleyn*, 10-11.
- 44 Cavendish, *The Life of Cardinal Wolsey, Volume 2*, 2:201.
- 45 Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, 70.
- 46 Walker, "Rethinking the Fall of Anne Boleyn," 26.
- 47 Cavendish, *The Life of Cardinal Wolsey, Volume 2*, 2:454.
- 48 Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII*, 191.
- 49 Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors, from A.D. 1485 to 1559*, 33.
- 50 "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10 - January-June 1536," note 284.