

The Other Boleyn Girl – Fiction versus Fact

Many people become interested in the Boleyns and Henry VIII after reading The Other Boleyn Girl or watching the movie. It is an entertaining story and leaves readers/viewers wanting to know more, but although it is inspired by history it is not a factual retelling of what happened.

| Fiction | Fact |
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| <p>Mary Boleyn the innocent – In the novel, Mary is worried about sleeping with the King because of her sexual inexperience. Her sister Anne promises her father and uncle that she will "coach her well enough to get her into his bed". In the movie, she is also depicted as a virgin worrying about her wedding night with William Carey.</p> | <p>Most historians believe that Mary Boleyn slept with King Francis I of France while she was serving Mary Tudor, Queen of France, and before her wedding to William Carey in 1520. Rodolfo Pio, Bishop of Faenza, wrote of Mary saying, "the French king knew [her] here in France 'per una grandissima ribalda et infame sopre tutte' [a great prostitute and infamous above all]." See http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/mary-boleyn-was-she-really-the-mistress-of-francis-i/ for my thoughts on this.</p> <p>There is no evidence that Anne had any sexual experience before she began co-habiting with Henry VIII in 1532, so she would not have been an ideal coach for Mary in the early 1520s.</p> |
| <p>Anne Boleyn Entraps Henry Percy – she plots to attract Henry Percy so that she can be Duchess of Northumberland and be wealthy.</p> | <p>There is no evidence that Anne set out to trap Percy and it is likely to have been a love match - the two of them meeting at court and falling in love. George Cavendish, Cardinal Wolsey's gentleman-usher, describes how Percy was working in Wolsey's household and Anne was serving Queen Catherine. According to Cavendish, when the Cardinal spent time at Court, Percy "would then resort for his pastime unto the queen's chamber, and there would fall in dalliance among the queen's ladies, being at the last more conversant with Mistress Anne Boleyn than with any other." It was then "that there grew such a secret love between them that, at length, they were ensured together, intending to marry." See http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/the-early-life-of-anne-boleyn-part-seven-the-butler-chaplain-courtier-and-poet/</p> |
| <p>Anne sleeps with Percy - Anne Boleyn becomes betrothed to Henry Percy and the</p> | <p>Mary Talbot, Percy's wife, claimed in 1532 that her marriage to Percy was invalid because he</p> |

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| <p>couple consummate their union to make it a binding marriage.</p> | <p>was already pre-contracted to marry Anne Boleyn. Henry Percy denied this by swearing an oath on the Blessed Sacrament, in front of the Duke of Norfolk, the archbishops and the King's canon lawyers. He also denied it in 1536 at Anne's fall. There is no evidence that Anne and Henry Percy slept together.</p> |
| <p>The Plotting Boleyns - Thomas Boleyn, his wife Elizabeth and her brother the Duke of Norfolk have regular family conferences and plot to use Mary and Anne as pawns to raise the family's status.</p> | <p>There is no evidence that the Boleyns/Howards schemed and used the girls as pawns, or that the girls were "coached". It is likely that Mary caught the King's eye with her pretty looks and Anne attracted him with her style and confidence, and that the families made the most of their favour. Women were seen as second-class citizens and daughters as chattels, but there is nothing to support the view that Thomas Boleyn set out to win favour through Mary and Anne.</p> <p>It can actually be argued that Thomas Boleyn was unhappy about his daughters' relationships with the King. The fact that the King had to step in and ask him to provide for his daughter Mary after she was widowed suggests that the Boleyns had distanced themselves from Mary after her affair with the King, and there is evidence that he was initially against Henry VIII's plans to marry Anne:</p> <p>"I must add that the said earl of Wiltshire has never declared himself up to this moment; on the contrary, he has hitherto, as the duke of Norfolk has frequently told me, tried to dissuade the King rather than otherwise from the marriage."</p> <p>See http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/in-defence-of-thomas-boleyn-father-of-anne-boleyn/</p> |
| <p>Anne Boleyn manipulates Henry VIII - In the novel, when Mary is pregnant, Anne is ordered by her family to flirt with the King and keep him happy so that he does not take another mistress. Elizabeth Boleyn says of Anne, "In the book, Elizabeth Boleyn says of Anne, "Thank God Anne has him in her toils. She plays with him like you might tease the queen's dog. She has him on a thread."</p> <p>When Henry becomes interested in her, Anne decides to "hold out till he sees that he has to make me an offer, a very great offer". In other words, she plots and plays with him due to her</p> | <p>There is no evidence to support this theory. Henry's love letters to Anne make it clear that he had to persuade her into the relationship and that she rebuffed his advances at first.</p> <p>I personally believe that Anne wanted to keep her virtue and not end up like her sister, an abandoned mistress with a bit of a reputation. There is no way that Anne Boleyn could have guessed that Henry would ever offer to make her his wife and queen when she refused to be his mistress, how could she? There was no precedent. Henry could have had any woman that he wanted, I'm sure Anne thought he would</p> |

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| <p>ambition to become queen.</p> <p>George Boleyn, Anne Boleyn and incest - has an unnatural relationship with his sisters. He kisses Mary and then says "Kiss me again, kiss me like you kiss Henry" and he kisses Anne like a lover, not a brother. It is clear that we are meant to think that Anne's third pregnancy is a result of incest.</p> <p>In the Q&A section of "The Other Boleyn Girl", Philippa Gregory writes "I think if she had thought that Henry could not bear a son she was quite capable of finding someone to father a child on her. If she thought that, then George would have been the obvious choice."</p> | <p>just move on to the next.</p> <p>Anne and George were found guilty of incest at their trial but there is absolutely NO evidence that they committed incest. The majority of historians believe that they were framed and Philippa Gregory is pretty much alone in believing that either of them would have contemplated it.</p> <p>Anne and George were evangelicals with a real faith and it is hard to believe that either of them would have contemplated committing incest, it also does not appear natural for a woman to resort to sleeping with her brother to get pregnant. If Henry VIII was having sexual problems, such as impotence/sexual dysfunction, then it would be difficult for Anne to pass off another man's child as his. It does not make sense.</p> <p>See http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/the-incest-question-by-clare-cherry/</p> |
| <p>George Boleyn is homosexual or bisexual – In the book, George has a sexual relationship with Sir Francis Weston and talks of how he is "in love" with him.</p> | <p>There is NO evidence that George, or any of the other four men, were homosexual or bisexual. All of the men confessed to being sinners in their execution speeches and Sir Francis Weston mentioned living in "abomination", but it is reading too much into their words to accuse them of what were illicit sexual acts.</p> <p>See http://youtu.be/SUfINOTBtAE and http://www.georgeboleyn.com/2014/03/28/george-boleyn-homosexual/</p> |
| <p>The deformed foetus – In 1536, Anne Boleyn miscarries a "monster", "a baby horribly malformed, with a spine flayed open and a huge head, twice as large as the spindly little body."</p> | <p>There is no mention of a deformed foetus in the contemporary primary sources and the only historical mention of it is in the writings of Nicholas Sander, a man who was a Catholic exile in Elizabeth I's reign and who set out to blacken Anne Boleyn's name. He was also the one who described Anne as having a "projecting tooth", "a large wen" and six fingers. The imperial ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, who hated Anne and called her "the concubine", simply reported that "the child had the appearance of a male about 3 months and a half old" and Charles Wriothesley said the same. The deformed foetus story is therefore nothing but a myth to make Anne Boleyn appear to be a witch or to back up the story that she had committed adultery or incest.</p> <p>See http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/anne-boleyns-final-pregnancy/</p> |

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| <p>Anne Boleyn is linked to witchcraft - In the novel, William Stafford says to Mary, "she [Anne] is certainly guilty of dabbling in witchcraft", and we see Anne taking a potion to bring on the miscarriage of her baby which has died in the womb and later in the novel miscarrying a monstrously deformed baby. The midwife who is present when Anne miscarries the "monster" admits to Mary that she has actually been employed by Henry to watch Anne and that she is a "witch taker".</p> | <p>Witchcraft was not something that was linked to Anne Boleyn in the sixteenth century, she was not charged with it at her fall in 1536 and there is no mention of it in the indictments. Giving birth to a deformed baby may have been seen as evidence of sexual sin or witchcraft, but there is no evidence that Anne <i>did</i> give birth to a deformed foetus.</p> <p>See http://www.susanhigginbotham.com/blog/posts/anne-boleyn-and-the-charge-of-witchcraft-a-guest-post-by-claire-ridgway/</p> |
| <p>Anne Boleyn steals Henry Carey, Mary's son</p> <p>- After the death of Mary's husband William Carey Anne Boleyn suggests to her sister that she should adopt little Henry Carey. When Mary protests, Anne tells her that it is already done. Anne takes Mary's son as part of her plan to marry Henry VIII.</p> | <p>Henry VIII granted Anne Boleyn the wardship of Henry Carey's in 1528, after the death of his father William Carey. There was nothing unusual about this. Mary was a widow and Anne was in a position to provide for Henry and she could ensure that her nephew had a good education. He received education at a Cistercian monastery and also under the tutelage of the French poet, Nicholas Bourbon. She did not adopt him. It was standard practice for the monarch to grant wardships to wealthy and influential courtiers, e.g. Lady Jane Grey was Thomas Seymour's ward and Catherine Willoughby was Charles Brandon's.</p> |
| <p>The "vilely jealous" Jane Boleyn – She is jealous, spiteful, "light fingered" and listens at doors and peeks through keyholes. She betrays the Boleyns by giving evidence against them. Gregory writes that "the strongest evidence against him was a statement written by Jane Parker, the wife he had always despised."</p> | <p>There is no evidence to support this characterization of Jane Boleyn and Jane did not confess to lying about George and Anne in her execution speech, that is a myth. Jane did tell Cromwell of Anne's indiscretion about Henry's sexual inadequacies, but we don't know what else Jane told Cromwell.</p> <p>See http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/jane-boleyn-historys-scapegoat/</p> |
| <p>Anne's lack of maternal love – Anne is horrified when she gives birth to a daughter, there is no relationship between her and her daughter, and there is an awful scene where Anne strips little Elizabeth half naked to prove to everyone that she is perfect and beautiful, Elizabeth's lip is trembling as Anne rages at Henry</p> | <p>It was Henry VIII who paraded his naked baby daughter in front of ambassadors to show how perfect she was. Also, Anne loved her daughter dearly and was a keen and good mother in the short time she had with her. Historian Tracy Borman writes of how courtiers were often embarrassed by Anne's displays of affection for her baby and that she loved to have Elizabeth next to her on a cushion, rather than shut away, out of sight and mind in a nursery. When Elizabeth was given her own household at Hatfield, Anne spent time carefully choosing fabrics for her daughter's clothes and visited her whenever possible.</p> <p>In April 1536, just a few days before her arrest. Anne met with her chaplain Matthew Parker and</p> |

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| | <p>asked him to look after her daughter's future spiritual welfare.</p> <p>See http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/anne-boleyn-mother/</p> |
| Anne Boleyn and murder – In the Q&A section of the book, Gregory says that Anne was “not a woman to let something like sin or crime stand in her way – she was guilty of one murder...” | <p>I assume she's referring to the poisoning of Bishop Fisher's household by his cook Richard Roose in 1531. All who ate the poisoned porridge became ill, and two people died, though Fisher survived. Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador, believed that Henry VIII became personally involved in this case and wanted Roose dealt with in a brutal manner (he was boiled to death) because he wanted “to avert suspicion from falling, if not on himself, for he is too noble-minded to have recourse to such means — at least on the Lady and her father.” There is, however, no evidence that the King or the Boleyns were involved in the poisoning.</p> <p>Roose did not implicate anybody else and claimed that he had put purgatives in the food “as a jest” and had not meant to harm anyone.</p> <p>See http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/5-april-1531-boiling-richard-roose-bishop-john-fishers-cook/</p> |
| Mary's children are fathered by Henry VIII | <p>The paternity of Mary's children is unknown. Catherine was born in 1524 and Henry in 1526, during her marriage to William Carey. Henry VIII did not acknowledge either child and it is not known when Mary slept with the King, it could well have been before her marriage to Carey. See</p> <p>http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/mary-boleyn-part-two-the-kings-children/</p> |
| Mary has a long and loving relationship with Henry VIII | <p>In reality, all we know is that Henry VIII had a sexual relationship with Mary Boleyn at some point. We only know this because the King applied for a dispensation from the Pope in 1527 to enable him to marry Anne Boleyn and in this dispensation was listed the impediment of “affinity arising from illicit intercourse in whatever degree, even the first” (there was the impediment of affinity in the first degree due to Henry having slept with Anne's sister).</p> <p>Perhaps they just had a one night stand or a short relationship while Bessie Blount was pregnant in 1519 and before Mary's marriage to William Carey in 1520. We don't know any details at all.</p> <p>See</p> <p>http://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/mary-boleyn-henry-viii/</p> |