

Mary Boleyn: The True Story of Henry VIII's Favourite Mistress

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The scandalous true story of Mary Boleyn, infamous sister of Anne, and mistress of Henry VIII. Mary Boleyn, 'the infamous other Boleyn girl', began her court career as the mistress of the king of France. Francois I of France would later call her 'The Great Prostitute' and the slur stuck. The bete-noir of her family, Mary was married her off to a minor courtier but it was not long before she caught the eye of Henry VIII and a new affair began. Although a bright star at Henry's court, she was soon eclipsed by her highly spirited and more accomplished sister, Anne, who rapidly took her place in the king's heart. However, the ups and downs of the Boleyn sisters were far from over. Mary would emerge the sole survivor of a family torn apart by lust and ambition, and it is in Mary and her progeny that the Boleyn legacy rests.

Mary Boleyn: The True Story of Henry VIII's Favourite Mistress Details


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From Reader Review Mary Boleyn: The True Story of Henry VIII's Favourite Mistress for online ebook

Kara says

I think it's a stretch for Wilkinson to suggest Mary Boleyn was the great love of Henry VIII's life – Henry loved Henry – but other than that, Wilkinson does a solid job examining the possible motives and reasoning behind the bare facts that we have to work with about her life.

Marc Kohlman says

Beautifully written biography with rich detail! Ever since I read Philippa Gregory's novel "The Other Boleyn Girl", Mary Boleyn had intrigued me both as a historical figure and as a ordinary person. Wilkinson really conducted meticulous research into the life of Henry VIII's most "infamous" mistress. She strips away the myths of what Mary's contemporaries and popular culture have said she was. I certainly think her children, Katharine and Henry, possibly were Henry's while evidence is circumstantial. While we do not know as much as we like to about Mary, this book tells her story very accurately and most of Wilkinson's own assumptions I agree with too. Mary certainly was fortunate to have avoided the tragic fates of her siblings and likely was not present at their executions. As much as she probably would have wanted to catch a final look at them, the risk for her and her family would have been too dire. The fact that she married out of love against family and law amazed me. Mary really did take a great risk in marrying William Stafford (which nobody can help but admire). She did live a content and happy life as a result. While her sister Anne is the more instantly recognizable and renowned of the Boleyns- Mary herself lived a dramatic, intimate and turbulent life far more intriguing than anything out of Historical Fiction. Despite her storied licentiousness and role as a pawn to advance the power of her family, Mary Boleyn lived her life to the full. She knew the best and worst about love, faced fortune and tragedy, was devoted to her relatives and in the end survived. Anyone interested in the Tudor period should read this book.

Jasmin says

The slimness of this book reflects the scarcity of knowledge about Mary Boleyn, mistress to Henry VIII prior to his marriage to Anne. It feels as though the author has to imagine far more than there is evidence for, and certain sections, especially regarding her children, feel somewhat repetitive. Overall though, this is a very easy read however it is best to have a bit of knowledge of the established Tudor chronology to put this in context.

Megan says

While I appreciate the author's efforts at focusing on the lesser-known Boleyn and understand it is difficult to interpret in light of few original sources, that doesn't excuse the fact that the writing was repetitive. The

author filled in the lack of information with more details about Anne and Henry, when the subject matter was intended to be Mary. Finally, the author seemed intent upon confirming every person's pedigree without really explaining why that information was important to her subject. Overall, a decent effort but not my favorite Tudor book. 2.5 stars

Shirley C says

More of a scholarly work (commentary, not novel form). It was interesting but only with a small amount of more information than has been generally gleaned from reading the novels. It was enjoyable, but not great.

Becky says

As a very basic history of the Henrican court this just about works, so long as you take the author's flights of fancy with a pinch of salt; as a history of it's title subject, Mary Boleyn this sucks. As it's such a slim work I wasn't expecting an in depth biography, but I was expecting more that one paragraph in five to concern 'the other Boleyn girl'. Even in the rare moments that Mary get's a mention in her own book, there is so much wild conjecture, and so little evidence as to make it rather pointless. Heavy use of fictionalized narrative further weakens the credentials of this work. It is possible to see how the author would have felt and acted had she been placed in Mary's position, but the motives and feelings of Mary are either absurdly assumed or simply missing. I accept that there is a lack of historical evidence concerning Mary, however that does not make it acceptable to assume that the surviving documents about other people vaguely connected to the court can be directly applied to Mary's life. The one point where the author uses a variety of sources is concerning the parentage of Mary's two children. The author goes to great pains to explain the pros and cons of the argument that they were fathered by Henry; eventually admitting that the majority of the evidence leans towards them being fathered by Mary's husband, and not by her lover. Once this, small piece of scholarship, is complete the author proceeds to ignore it, making the assumption for the rest of the work that the children were Henry's, and using this assumption as the basis for further assumptions. I think the author would be better placed writing historical fiction rather than passing her 'fiction' off as fact.

Tanzanite says

This is a pretty short biography that is rather sparse on factual information concerning Mary and resorts to descriptions of court, pageants, and other individuals connected to Mary as filler. Wilkinson does set out her theories (and some evidence both for and against) for Mary being the older sister and the likelihood that Henry VIII was the father of her children. It's not a bad book per se, it's just rather underwhelming.

Sarah Bryson says

I have always been fascinated with Mary Boleyn. Compared to her sister Anne she may be the unknown Boleyn sister, but for me there is so much more to Mary Boleyn. For me Mary is a woman of depth and substance, a woman whom defied the common rules of the time, defied her parents and ultimately followed her heart.

Unfortunately there has not been a great deal of information recorded about Mary. What has been recorded is scant but I felt as though Josephine Wilkinson did a marvellous job of compiling the small details about Mary's life together to create a broader picture of his incredible woman. Wilkinson writes about Mary's early years, where she was born and where she spent her youth. There are records that show Mary Boleyn went to France to serve as a lady in waiting to Princess Mary Tudor and Wilkinson talks about what Mary may have experienced and learnt during her time in France. She also looks at how Mary became a mistress to King Francis I, although for how long it is impossible to say.

Wilkinson then moves on to talk about Mary's return to England, her marriage to Henry Carey and how she caught the eye of Henry VIII and became his mistress. It is believed that she was the King's mistress for approximately three or so years, during which time she bore two children, Katherine Carey and Henry Carey. There is a great deal of debate as to whether the two children are Henry VIII's illegitimate children and Wilkinson goes into a lot of detail outlining the pros and cons as to why they might or might not be the children of Henry VIII. The reasons proposed that both children might be fathered by Henry VIII is that during the time when Katherine and Henry were conceived Mary was the mistress of Henry VIII and sleeping with the King. Also there were rumours that Henry Carey looked quite a lot like Henry VIII and that Henry VIII gave Mary's husband Henry Carey a series of grants and appointments around the time each child was born. On the other hand the suggestions against the two children being fathered by Henry VIII are that it is quite possible during the time Mary was the King's mistress she may have also been sleeping with her husband. Henry VIII never acknowledged Katherine or Henry as his children, where had had acknowledged Henry Fitzroy, a son he bore with his previous mistress Bessie Blount. Wilkinson also proposes that Henry VIII may have had low fertility and that the grants given to Henry Carey could have just been to keep him silent and happy about his wife sleeping with the King.

There are many reasons for and against Katherine Carey and Henry Carey being or not being the children of Henry VIII. Wilkinson draws the conclusion that both children were probably fathered by Henry VIII but personally I do not believe they were. I just do not think there is enough evidence to prove that the children were fathered by Henry and one of the biggest reasons is that he never acknowledged them as his own, especially Henry Carey a male child.

After this Wilkinson writes about how Mary's husband Henry Carey died of the sweating sickness and left Mary with two young children. The wardship of Mary's son was granted to her sister Anne who went about providing a good upbringing and education for the boy.

Wilkinson also details Mary's second marriage, a marriage which shocked quite a few people including Mary's sister and family. In 1534 Mary Boleyn married again, but this time her husband was not chosen for her by her father, nor was he even a man of equal status. In fact William Stafford was nothing more than a soldier and a gentleman usher to the King. He was man far below Mary in status and this combined with the fact she married without her father's consent, found Mary and her new husband banished from court. I find this utterly incredible in a time when women were often reliant upon their fathers or family to make a marriage match for them, Mary took matters in her own hands and married for love. She followed her heart and although she faced the consequences we learn that she would have gladly repeated her actions all over again.

In the book is included a beautifully written letter by Mary outlining her plight, begging Thomas Cromwell for some financial assistance since she and her husband had been banished. She also wished for him to intercede with her sister and father because she is upset she has lost their affection. Yet she also states in the letter that she loves her husband and would gladly lead a poor woman's life to be with him.

I think Mary's letter to Thomas Cromwell is one of the most eloquent, most beautiful letters I have ever read. Even though Mary's letter was written over four and a half centuries ago you can still feel the passion, the despair, the longing and the love contained within her words. It is a beautiful letter which tugs at the heart strings even to this day.

Wilkinson then moves on to look at Mary's relationship with her sister Anne. Once again there is not a great deal recorded about Mary during her sister's courtship with Henry VIII or her time as Queen. Unfortunately there is absolutely nothing written about Mary's feelings on the charges of incest, adultery and treason brought against her brother and sister and we do not even know if Mary was allowed, or even wanted to visit them while they were in the Tower. My thought is that Mary probably would not have even been allowed to visit her siblings and she was probably kept away from court during this quite intense time.

After the death of her brother and sister Mary seems to slip into obscurity for a period of time. Wilkinson notes that her daughter Katherine became a lady in waiting to Anne of Cleves and that over the years Mary and her second husband William inherited some property and lands from Mary's father after his death and were also granted some money from the King. It seems that in the end, even though Mary was banished from court for her marriage and at one stage was near financial ruin, she managed to live the last years of her life in at least some financial stability. Mary Boleyn died on July 30th 1543 and her place of burial is unknown.

At the end of this book I was left feeling both happy and sad. I greatly admire Mary Boleyn. Here is a woman whom dared to stand out on her own, she defied her father, her sister the Queen of England and her family, and married for love. She seems to have been the type of woman who followed her heart and although she faced many ups and downs overall it appears as though she ended her days happily. Yet the other part of me felt a little sad. Mary Boleyn was just as brave and ambitious as her sister Anne, but because she never became Queen of England, because her heart was set on love rather than the crown, so much of her life has been lost to history. Not even her final resting place has been recorded. I think Mary Boleyn deserves more recognition and credit than she has received and I am so glad that Josephine Wilkinson has written a book to shed a little more light on this fascinating woman.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading about Mary Boleyn. Wilkinson has a very smooth writing style which flows and draws the reader in making them want to learn more. I was so captivated by this book that I ended up reading it all in one day! I strongly recommend this book to any lover of Tudor history. Mary Boleyn is a fascinating person and one that people should learn more about.

Rebecca Nelson says

Very easy read and interesting in regards to the history of the time. A biography about Mary Boleyn it is not-very little is told about the title subject, seemingly due to little surviving historical evidence regarding her. The cynic in me feels this may have been an attempt by the author to sell more books in light of the recent "the other Boleyn girl" film success...

Charlotte says

Felt like I was reading an encyclopedia- way too many facts spouted out without weaving it into a storyline.

Sarah - All The Book Blog Names Are Taken says

I have been fascinated by Mary for a long time, I find her far more intriguing than Anne. You can't help but feel sorry for her, given how Anne and George always seemed to be favored by their father. Unfortunately this biography doesn't give any new information or insight into Mary's life; but that's not entirely unexpected, given the time period. The trouble I have with this text is the leaps the author takes with the information we do have access to. Most notably, there is no concrete evidence that Mary and Henry had any children, despite their affair going on while she was married to get first husband; they very well could have been the products of her marriage to her first husband.

Some reviewers seem to take issue with Mary not always being the focus of her own biography which is understandable. However, given the turbulent times and how entwined Mary's and Anne's lives were because of the situation, that backstory is important.

Overall, it's not a terrible introduction to the life of Mary Boleyn and is a very quick read, I finished it in a couple hours.

Rose says

Not much information on Mary. Like several biographies related to Boleyn family this one follows suit with overshadowing Mary with Ann, I found this biography detailing Ann Boleyn rise and not Mary. However their was some interesting information about Henry's other mistress.

Kathleen says

I did thoroughly enjoy this book about Mary Boleyn, one of my all time favorite historical personages, and her family. Josephine Wilkinson did a fine job with SOME equivocating on the actual paternal line of Henry and Catherine Carey. I work extensively with DNA..it would be lovely to know that for sure.

Mary, to me and apparently to the author, was a sympathetic character and I feel redeemed herself as she bowed out of Henry VIII's life.

Recommended to many others, who like Tudor historicals, I really only like some of them, Mary Boleyn and her family primarily, as well as the Planatagenets.

Jonathan says

Commissioned by me, sold out in two months and currently reprinting.

Luv_trinity says

I remember when I first heard about this book, I couldn't wait for the release date, so I order the book as soon as it hit the bookstores in England. Once it arrive , I started reading it, and I finish the whole book in about 2 hours. yep, 2 hours. It's a very short and easy read. Only 200 pages double space. The whole book reads like a teen's essay . There is nothing new at all in this book about Mary Boleyn,and most of it is guess work, as in what Mary might have done, or how she might have felt. However, the book wasn't bad, it wasn't great . This book will be great for someone who 's in their teens (preteens) who just started reading about Anne Boleyn,and Mary Boleyn.
