



**Edward VI.** *England's Boy King: The Diary of Edward VI, 1547-1553.* Welwyn Garden City: Ravenhall Books, 2005. 191 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-905043-04-0.



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## Revisiting Two Tudors

Eric Ives staked out the subject of Anne Boleyn as his special expertise with the publication of his magisterial biography *Anne Boleyn* (1986). The second wife of Henry VIII was a figure of intense controversy in her day and has remained so in the partisan polemics associated with the English Reformation and among modern historians. Since 1986, Ives has engaged other scholars, most notably George Bernard and Retha Warnicke, in debate through various articles dealing with disputed aspects of Anne Boleyn's life. Now Ives has tied all of these debates together and other new research of his own along with new scholarship to produce *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn: "The Most Happy"*. Although the new book has a different title and it is not identified as a second edition in the copyright information or the author's preface, it contains a preponderant amount of the same text as the 1986 book. That said, the 2004 book does contain significant new material. Whereas the 1986 book had eighteen chapters, the new book has twenty-four chapters. The incorporation of new research necessitated the creation of new chapters, such as "Personal Religion," or the splitting of existing chapters, such as chapters 15 and 16 respectively into "Image" and "Art and Taste." *The Life and Death of*

*Anne Boleyn* definitely supersedes Ives's earlier biography. The one unfortunate difference is that the new edition uses endnotes while the 1986 book used far more preferable footnotes. It is particularly inconvenient in a book that includes so many debatable points that keep the curious reader flipping back and forth between text and endnotes.

Anne Boleyn is a perennial subject for biographers and for good reason. As Ives remarked in 1986, "the story of Anne Boleyn remains one of the great romantic tragedies of Europe."<sup>[1]</sup> But in his new book he adds the judgment that Anne "was the most influential and important queen consort this country has ever had" (p. xv). The fact is that courtship and romance, adultery and divorce, and intrigue and plots all make at least as "rattling good history" as war. Life among the royals frequently has all the elements of a soap opera. Ives's achievement in both of his biographies of Anne Boleyn has been to produce a scholarly biography of this very important queen that maintains the high drama but avoids dwelling on the salacious and sensational.

Ives presents Anne Boleyn as a highly intelligent and

quick-witted woman. While not extraordinarily beautiful, she had her physical attractions such as her beautiful dark hair. Her greatest asset, however, was her personality. Anne was strong-willed but also vivacious and she projected a sexuality that drew men to her. She was well equipped to play the game of courtly love that occupied a prominent place in social interactions at the courts of Europe. Sent to the sophisticated courts of Burgundy and France for training at a young age, Anne proved an adept pupil. When she returned to England, she exuded a novel cosmopolitanism that set her apart from her female peers. These were traits that ultimately grabbed and kept Henry VIII's attention and caused him to make that rare move among kings of marrying for love. In spite of all that, such a relationship was prone to instability and it ultimately failed over Anne's inability to provide Henry VIII with a male heir.

Anne Boleyn's life is full of ambiguities and controversies that Ives's biography addresses. In the second edition, much of the scholarly debate occurs in the endnotes where Ives rebuts the contentions of Retha Warnicke, the author of a rival biography, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* (1989), that differs significantly from Ives or the emphases of George Bernard, a historian engaged in promoting a major revision of the history of Henrician England. Remarkably for such a well-known person, the year of Anne's birth is uncertain. The dates of *circa* 1501 or *circa* 1507 have been commonly used by scholars with Ives definitely favoring 1501 on the basis of some strong documentary evidence. Another problem is the birth order of Anne and her sister Mary Boleyn. Traditionally it has been thought that Mary was the older sister, especially since she had been Henry VIII's mistress prior to his courtship of Anne. Ives agrees with the traditional birth order, but he also places the period of Mary's relationship with Henry VIII during the mid-1520s—the early years of her marriage to William Carey. The King's affair with Mary Boleyn, according to Ives's chronology, only ended by the beginning of 1526, shortly before he began to pursue her sister Anne in the mode of courtly love.

Many of Anne's contemporaries and later commentators have blamed her for breaking up Henry VIII's marriage with Katherine of Aragon. But as Ives points out, the King's first marriage was dead prior to Anne's coming on the scene. His anxiety about the lack of a male heir in the royal succession had already reached a crisis point. The King was already considering an annulment of his marriage before he asked Anne to be his mistress at Easter 1527, a proposition she refused. A few months later in June, Henry VIII and Anne decided to marry.

Prior to that point, the King had seen his unsatisfactory situation with Katherine of Aragon and his infatuation with Anne Boleyn as disconnected issues.

Once Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn decided to marry, they both pushed vigorously for a papal annulment of the King's first marriage. International politics were completely unfavorable and the more Henry VIII pressed the issue, the more domestic politics turned against him. Ives describes Anne's role in the years 1528-32. It was a long, frustrating wait for the love-besotted couple. During its course, the great Cardinal Thomas Wolsey fell from the King's grace—with a lot of help from Anne Boleyn. She also helped to promote a radical party that favored England breaking its ecclesiastical obedience to the papacy. Thomas Cromwell gained much of his initial advancement in Henry VIII's government due to Anne's assistance. Ultimately they all worked together to secure the break from Rome, the establishment of the royal supremacy, and the marriage of Henry VIII and Anne.

Some historians and biographers have viewed Anne's marriage to Henry VIII as unhappy. Ives would disagree. Queen Anne was a great patron of art and culture. She had a keen sense for promoting her queenly image, which was astute as she was widely unpopular. While queen, she promoted religious reform in a manner similar to evangelicals in France during the early Reformation. She also advanced like-minded people in the government and the church. Giving birth to Elizabeth was a disappointment to her and to Henry VIII, but they continued to try for a male child, although as Ives notes, Henry VIII was not a fecund father. As a couple, they had their ups and downs but that is hardly surprising. Both lived under a high degree of stress—an uncertain royal succession, hostility from Emperor Charles V and the papacy, a disgruntled realm, and a bitter ex-wife with an even more bitter and obstreperous daughter, Mary. Even Henry VIII's little sister Mary, Duchess of Suffolk, disapproved of his second marriage. A baby boy would have fixed all, but none arrived to save the day. Added to this tension, Henry VIII and Anne possessed volatile and assertive personalities. They were bound to quarrel. As Ives depicts it, however, until almost the very end, their marriage was fundamentally solid. Having good arguments was actually something they liked about each other.

Unfortunately for Anne Boleyn, as Ives reconstructs it, by the late spring of 1536, she faced a perfect storm of problems. Katherine of Aragon had died, which would allow Henry VIII to repudiate Anne without embarrassing complications if he chose. Meanwhile Charles V sought a

reapproachment with England now that his aunt Katherine of Aragon was out of the way. At this time, Henry VIII had begun a courtly love sort of flirtation with Jane Seymour that aroused intense jealousy in Anne and estranged her from her husband. That marital tension was heightened by Anne Boleyn miscarrying for a second time. Ives, however, argues that none of this was fatal to the marriage. Instead, the problem was that Thomas Cromwell had come to see Anne Boleyn and her inner circle as a danger. They increasingly opposed his policies and undermined his influence with the King, so he began to ally himself with the old opposition to Anne. But he also set things up to be able to put them down right after the Queen's fall, so as to leave him in sole charge. It was an audacious and dangerous maneuver on his part. He and his allies prepared to spring a trap, but with no way of knowing how they would get Anne into it. At the end of April 1536 they got lucky. The arrest of Mark Smeton, Anne's musician, precipitated the crisis. Smeton cracked, Anne panicked, things were said, statements were taken out of context, enemies added lies and innuendoes, and Henry VIII went along with all of it. Ives rejects the contention that any of the charges against Anne and her five alleged lovers had merit. Events moved fast: arrested on May 2, Queen Anne had been tried, convicted, and executed by May 19. It was not Henry VIII's or Thomas Cromwell's finest hour. Ives considers Anne Boleyn innocent and the charges against her to be a malicious smoke screen that was widely disbelieved at the time and ought to be today.

Edward VI (1537-1553) started to keep a sort of daily journal in March 1550 when he was twelve years old. He sometimes called it a chronicle. Initially it had the appearance of an assignment from his tutors, but he appears to have found keeping such a record personally satisfying. At the start of his journal he went back to the beginning of his reign and gave yearly summaries for 1547, 1548, and 1549. After that he attempted to keep a daily

record of events. Unlike a true diary, he actually says little about his own daily activities or his personal feelings or opinions. It has been pointed out that none of Edward VI's supposed piety appears in this work. Instead, he comes across as cold, detached, and secular. It is possible that this reflects the limitations of the type of document more than the boy-king's personality. Jousting and wars take up a disproportionate amount of the entries. Basically the young king recorded what others told him about events and one of his most significant informants was the French ambassador. While the Chronicle is an important source for Edwardian history, it is hardly autobiographical, except in the most indirect way.

This new edition of Edward VI's Chronicle is intended for general readers. Spelling and syntax have been modernized and annotations have been supplied, all to clarify the text. The editor claims that this new edition is the first since Bishop Gilbert Burnet's defective transcription in his *History of the Reformation* (1715) and John Gough Nichols's first class *Literary Remains of King Edward the Sixth*, first published in 1857-1858. That claim is not true. There is also W. K. Jordan's excellent edition *The Chronicle and Political Papers of King Edward VI* (1966) which has a far more scholarly and comprehensive introduction, more extensive annotations, and which preserves the original flavor of Edward VI's writing better. Ives's updated biography of Anne Boleyn is a must-read for anyone interested in the early Tudors. We can be grateful that he returned to the subject and in this update, his original conclusions have stood the test of time and survived the accumulation of ongoing research intact. As for *The Boy King*, Jordan's *Chronicle* remains the best modern edition for scholarly purposes.

#### Note

[1]. Eric Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. vii.

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