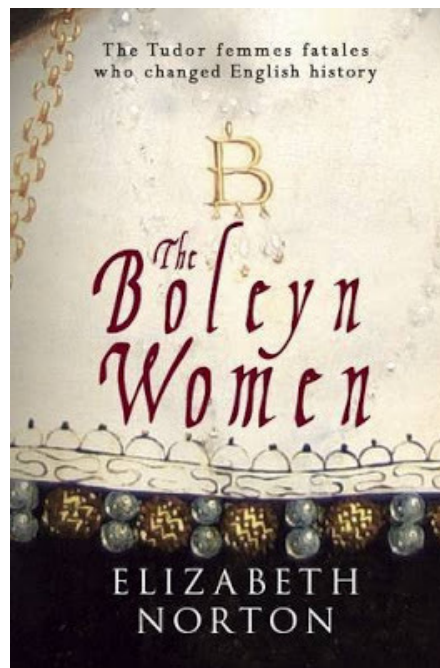




The Boleyn Women: The Tudor Femmes Fatales Who Changed English History

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The Boleyn family appeared from nowhere at the end of the fourteenth century, moving from peasant to princess in only a few generations. The women of the family brought about its advancement, beginning with the heiresses Alice Bracton Boleyn, Anne Hoo Boleyn and Margaret Butler Boleyn who brought wealth and aristocratic connections. Then there was Elizabeth Howard Boleyn, who was rumored to have been the mistress of Henry VIII, along with her daughter Mary and niece Madge, who certainly were. Anne Boleyn became the king's second wife and her aunts, Lady Boleyn and Lady Shelton, helped bring her to the block. The infamous Jane Boleyn, the last of her generation, betrayed her husband before dying on the scaffold with Queen Catherine Howard.

The next generation was no less turbulent and Catherine Carey, the daughter of Mary Boleyn fled from England to avoid persecution under Mary Tudor. Her daughter, Lettice was locked in bitter rivalry with the greatest Boleyn lady of all, Elizabeth I, winning the battle for the affections of Robert Dudley but losing her position in society as a consequence. Finally, another Catherine Carey, the Countess of Nottingham, was so close to her cousin, the queen, that Elizabeth died of grief following her death.

The Boleyn family was the most ambitious dynasty of the sixteenth century, rising dramatically to prominence in the early years of a century that would end with a Boleyn on the throne.

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Mercedes says

DNF. I love the Tudors and Boleyns, and I thought this book would be perfect in understanding a little more about where Anne and her sister Mary came from, however this is written more as a reference book than a novel. There are SO many names and SO many dates and SO MANY PEOPLE thrown at you that I made it 12% of the way through before I realized I had no idea what the hell I had just read.

I skipped forward to read some of the other chapters (such as the one about Anne's mother, Elizabeth), but it was much of the same. It also doesn't help that so many people back then shared the same name...Thomas Boleyn, George Boleyn, Thomas Howard, Elizabeth Boleyn...there were numerous people with the same names but from different years. Some families even named two children the same name if one had passed away before the second was born.

If you're a DIE-HARD Boleyn fan, or you're doing a school report on the Boleyns, then this is a book for you. However if you're looking for any type of story, then move along, because this is NOT the book you are looking for.

Sylvia Zupanec says

Elizabeth Norton's "The Boleyn Women" is a study of eight generations of Boleyn women, from the first 'Anne Boleyn' who lived during the Middle Ages to the Queen Anne Boleyn's daughter, Elizabeth I.

The Boleyn family first emerged in the late fourteenth century at Salle in Norfolk. Norton points out that "the family's origins were deeply unpromising and an observer in the thirteenth, fourteenth and even fifteenth century would never dreamed that the family would produce two queens of England" (p. 9) and that "while the family may have had tenuous claims to gentle status they were more appropriately part of the yeoman class - prosperous tenant farmers, with the focus of their activities at Salle"(p.11)

One of the family's chief male representatives was Geoffrey Boleyn, a man who started his career as a hatter and later, thanks to his determination and hard work, became wealthy mercer and Lord Mayor of London. The first recorded Boleyn woman was Emma Boleyn, noted in a court roll in 1377; apart from her name, however, nothing is known of her life. Although so many Boleyn women entered the pages of history, they remain unknown to us.

One of my favourite parts of this book was discussion about Anne Boleyn's aunts. "Lady Boleyn" who accompanied Anne Boleyn in the Tower is usually described in historical books simply as "Lady Boleyn" or as Anne Tempest Boleyn. Elizabeth Norton, however, points out that "Lady Boleyn" was Elizabeth Wood Boleyn, the wife of James Boleyn (brother of Thomas Boleyn).

I enjoyed reading about female relatives of Anne Boleyn and I think it's important to learn more about ancestors of famous historical figures.

Sarah Bryson says

Elizabeth Norton's book is a captivating and compelling read focusing on the women of the Boleyn family from the fourteenth century to the last Boleyn women, Elizabeth I and Catherine Carey, daughter of Mary Boleyn. Norton's book focuses upon both the women who were born into the Boleyn line and also those that became Boleyn women through marriage. Her book traces the rise of the Boleyn women, from the earliest back in the thirteenth and fourteenth century who were land owners and members of minor gentry through the rise of the Boleyn's through inheritance, marriage and simple clever planning and skill.

Throughout the centuries the Boleyn women were not just simple wives, sisters and daughters who were pale shadows compared to their husbands. Elizabeth Norton gives these women life, gives them a voice by which to tell their stories, their life's adventures and their rise through not only marriage but also through their own skills and cunning. It is fascinating to read about these women, the stories of their lives, their time at court, the tragedies they faced and how they overcame the difficulties that surrounded them. As I said Norton's book gives these Boleyn women a voice so that we the reader may hear their tales five hundred years after they have passed.

Norton's book is brilliantly researched and it is obvious through the amount of detail that is put into the book that Norton has a strong love and interest in the women of the Boleyn family. Accompanying the book are wonderful pictures and portraits which provide the reader with, in some cases, faces of Boleyn women to stare upon. The photographs also show effigies, locations and people relevant to the life of various Boleyn women, all of which add an extra depth to the readers understanding of the women they are reading about.

I especially loved the section about Mary Boleyn (my personal favourite Boleyn woman!) It was interesting to read about her life, her relationship with Henry VIII and her daughter, Catherine Carey and her time at court.

Overall I thoroughly enjoyed Elizabeth Norton's book on the Boleyn women. She did not simply focus upon Anne Boleyn, quite arguably one of the most famous women of the Boleyn family; instead Norton gave each woman their own section in which she brought their lives to the forefront and provided the reader with interesting and emotive information about them. This was a wonderful, captivating and thoroughly enjoyable book and I would recommend it to anyone interested in Tudor history or the study of women.

Annette says

Source: Free copy from Amberley for the purpose of review.

Summary:

Anne Boleyn is infamous as being Henry's tumultuous second wife. Her sister Mary was known as his mistress; however, what do we know of the other Boleyn women who lived in the 13th (late 1200s) through 17th centuries (1603); each with ambitions, intelligence, and leaving their own mark in history.

The following women are depicted in The Boleyn Women:

Alice Bracton Boleyn

Anne Hoo Boleyn

Anne Boleyn Heydon

Margaret Butler Boleyn

Elizabeth Howard Boleyn

Mary Boleyn

Anne Boleyn
Anne Tempest Boleyn
Elizabeth Wood Boleyn, Lady Boleyn
Margaret (Madge) Shelton
Mary Shelton
Jane Parker Boleyn, Lady Rochford
Catherine Carey Knollys, daughter of Mary Boleyn
Lettice Knollys Dudley
Elizabeth I

Thoughts:

This is the third book I've read by Elizabeth Norton. In all three books I've come to enjoy the detailed significant research brought forth, certain points I'd not read about before, an unbiased opinion, and characters in history that are dimensional.

Anne Boleyn is the most interesting of all the Boleyn women. I've read several books on her and still, she is a complicated person to describe in one sentence. She's a polarity of character traits, maybe this is one of the reasons she's such an enigma. I'm reminded of the old nursery rhyme: "When she was good she was very very good and when she was bad she was awful." Mary Boleyn did not seek to be more than a mistress, her sister Anne's ambitions were higher. I feel Elizabeth Norton gave me a strong view of Anne. Books on Anne that I've read before have focused on either a good and martyred Anne, or a villainous Anne.

I'd not read before of a "scuffle" between Anne and Henry's next wife Jane Seymour. I wonder if Henry was amused by this, angered, or if his already inflated pride swelled more?

Anne was a strong-willed woman, this personality trait rubbed Henry the wrong way after they were married, he wanted an obedient wife like Jane.

Helene Harrison says

Review - This book was very well put-together. It offers a full view of the Boleyn family, particularly the women, from the first known Boleyn down through the reign of Elizabeth I. The family connections are drawn together well to create an atmosphere of family and connections which influenced the later women in the line. Norton could have done with a little more explanation of the family connections, as it did get a little confusing at times, particularly in the first few chapters where less is known. Nonetheless, definitely worth a read.

General Subject/s? - History / Tudors / Henry VIII / Elizabeth I / Anne Boleyn / Politics

Recommend? - Yes.

Rating - 18/20

Cynthia says

I really enjoyed this book. It got very confusing (not the author's fault) because it seemed everybody was named Anne, or Elizabeth, or Catherine, or Margaret. There is the random Lettice or Philadelphia thrown in there but in yore days they were not big on originality in names - actually naming siblings the same name, or if one child died naming another after him/her. (to the Irish that is bad mojo - like inviting the same fate for the second child as befell the first). So I would get confused especially since there were multiple

Anne Boleyns, in the same family grouping at the same time. But it was very interesting and I love this period of history, so seeing this fresh perspective was very enjoyable.

Latte says

For those interested in the family history of the women who were both born and married into the Boleyn family, this provides a good read. Unfortunately, because there is so little written history related to females of this time, much has to be deduced based on household accounts and related doings of their male relations (husbands, brothers, etc.) We are provided with an introduction to many of these women but there is little in depth to be found. It is rather scholarly inclined (lots of footnotes) and comes across a bit dry in reading. I was tempted to skim through sections, particularly those on Anne and her daughter Elizabeth as there is much already documented on them both. The various relationships make you want to refer back to the family tree as much as possible to get them all straight. This was actually one book that I felt would do better in digital vs. physical form to allow the reader to click between the various members of the family to allow for cross-referencing.

Bottom line - will appeal to history buffs interested in the more minor characters surrounding the more well known of the Tudor/Elizabethan era.

Carolina Casas says

The story of the Boleyn women is a story of family loyalty and of ambition. Indeed. Norton traces the humble origins of the Boleyn family and their connections, by marriage or through blood, with the de Clares, Bouchiers, Howards, Welles, and so many others from which they shared a connection with Jane Seymour's family. It is a great and emotional read about the women in this family and she presents it in such a way that you empathize with them and feel saddened at the end by their struggles and sacrifices.

Norton also offers new and interesting theories regarding some of the women, Mary Boleyn, Elizabeth Howard-Boleyn, Anne, Catherine Howard, Jane Parker-Boleyn, Catherine and Henry Carey (where she says that it was probably Catherine, out of the two, who was Henry's daughter, not Henry who was born at a time when the affair had ended), Mary Shelton (who she says was likely to be the "Madge" Chapuys was referring in his dispatches and while I was skeptical of this at first, she gives good evidence to prove her point), and so many others.

Norton also dispels the negative propaganda that has centered on Anne's immediate family, herself, her mother and her brother by pointing out that a lot of this was written years after their deaths by Elizabeth's enemies or former rivals who had an agenda of their own. One thing I didn't agree was leaning to the idea that while she was not fully guilty, that Jane Parker was still participant in her sister in law and husband's fall. She sets the record straight she is not the serpentine or lusty version of the six wives and Tudors respectively, but she doesn't do a lot to exonerate her from her alleged involvement in their deaths. In reality there is no proof that she and George had a cold marriage or an unhappy one, Norton agrees but doesn't think she was all innocent. The real person who doomed them with her testimony (as did many others) was the Countess of Worcester.

The last chapter "the last Boleyn" I felt like it was rushed over with some facts being omitted to make Bess look better but overall it was a magnificent conclusion to a great book.

I highly recommend this, even if you're not interested in history, you will find this a delightful and captivating read.

Kim says

[Everyone knows the story of Mary Boleyn, of Anne Boleyn and her daughter, Elizabeth I. But what about Anne Boleyn's forebearers - her mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and so on? What about Mary Boleyn's daughter, Catherine Carey (who

Finuala says

Very enjoyable. Norton sets herself the task of following the story of the Boleyn woman from humble beginnings to Queens of England in two centuries and en route gives us a glimpse into the lives of mediaeval and Tudor women in the broader sense. In an age when marriage was truly a transfer of ownership from man to man, when women were forbidden to own property and thus not allowed to make wills and were expected to be subservient to fathers, brothers and husbands, the Boleyn women who emerge from these pages are strong, stubborn and often downright sassy. This is an excellent romp through the history and I found it hard to put down. Even the somewhat patchy editing did not detract from my enjoyment and I can heartily recommend it to anyone interested in the period in general and women's history in particular.

Kara says

Norton traces the beginnings of the Boleyn family and shows that there were quite a number of Boleyn women worthy of attention before Anne and her daughter rolled onto the scene.

The problem, of course, is before Anne Boleyn was in Henry VIII's line of sight, the Boleyn women were very much not on the scene, being very much a country family who were known and successful in their own county, but absolutely nowhere near the world stage.

This means that Norton doesn't have a lot of primary sources to work with, but she is able to extrapolate quite a lot about these women's lives from wills and grave memorials as well as that always useful cache of 15th century gossip – the Paston letters. Oh those gossipy Pastons!

Surprisingly, (or not, given the lack of primary sources) we already get to Anne Boleyn's mother by the 50 page mark, and by 100 pages in we're covering Mary Boleyn's affair with Henry VIII. ("never with the mother" hehehe) Norton gives a fair amount of coverage to Mary Boleyn, acknowledging she was just as much a Boleyn as her sister and worthy of historical analysis. Norton, however, unlike Weir, comes down heavy on the slept-around-the-French-court theory.

Back to England as we follow more of the Boleyn family and their immediate relations. There is a Gordian knot of connections of parentage and marriage between Boleyns, Howards, Mowbrays, Beauforts, Sheltons, etc, plus, of course, all the passing around of titles to Norfolk, Sussex, Surrey, etc. It should all be headache inducing, but instead, I found it all absolutely hypnotizing to see the kaleidoscope of connections between members of the Tudor and Plantagenet courts and looooved getting this different perspective on how everyone I'd heard of before had these loooooong backgrounds with everyone else.

This continues as Norton covers Anne Boleyn as courtier and then queen, showing how she was in the middle of a sea of family connections, some helpful, others hindrances, and she was navigating through

decades worth of family-political alliances and feuds as well as the whole Reformation issue.

The dramatic fall of Anne Boleyn here focuses on the role various family members played and where everyone was when the Boleyn family suddenly lost their political capital. After that, Norton follows up on the various low key marriages, property settlements and estate planning all the Boleyn cousins settled into, most determined to keep their heads down after Anne's spectacular failure.

Except, of course, for Lady Jane Rochford, who gets her own chapter so Norton can give the needed space to examining what might have happened and what on earth Jane was thinking.

After that debacle, Norton digs into Princess Elizabeth's childhood and I was surprised to learn that the Carey cousins (maybe half siblings), Henry and Catherine were, like, 99% chance, raised alongside Elizabeth and she retained a strong affection for them, especially since they all had the shared bonding experience of surviving the rocky reigns of Edward and Mary.

When she came to the throne, Elizabeth's cousins played some important roles at her court, and then, due to the fecundity of Mary Boleyn's progeny, Queen Elizabeth had dozens of Boleyn relatives running around her court, arising some jealously from the other factions.

Norton does an excellent job examining the remarkable lives of the many Boleyn women and the part they played in British history.

Lina Joseph says

If you want a book that explains the whole research and arguments on why they think someone is someone than this is the book. The narrative it's not that good in my opinion and its really easy to get confused. Too many details.

James says

So much has been written about Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII of England, and mother of Queen Elizabeth I, in both fiction and non-fiction. In this book, Elizabeth Norton, looks at the Boleyn's from a new perspective, focusing on the women in the family, from those who were Boleyn's by birth, and including those who became Boleyn's through marriage. From humble beginnings in Norfolk in the thirteenth century, the family's prospects rose thanks to good marriages and keen ambition. Norton takes the readers on a journey, from the earliest Boleyn's on record, right up to Catherine Carey, daughter of Mary Boleyn (and possibly Henry VIII), whose daughter Lettice Knollys, married Lord Robert Dudley, favourite of her cousin the Queen. And Queen Elizabeth I herself, who died of grief following the death of Catherine Carey, Countess of Nottingham, another Boleyn woman.

Unfortunately due to lack of records, it is hard to get a full picture of the earliest Boleyn women, yet Norton does her best with the few records she has available. It does get confusing at times, with so many members of the family having the same name as well.

Whilst the sections on Queen Anne Boleyn and Elizabeth I don't exactly shed any new light or evidence that hasn't already been written about, Norton does give us a more clearer view of Elizabeth Howard Boleyn, mother of Mary, George and Anne, and grandmother of Elizabeth I, showing her to have perhaps been a more affectionate mother than she is often given credit for, as well as been sort out for advice on court

etiquette. Likewise, the section on Jane Parker Boleyn, the infamous Lady Rochford, is interesting as Norton looks at her role in the fall of her husband and sister-in-law.

Thanks to prosperous marriages into the Bracton, Hoo, Butler and Howard families, as well as the keen ambition of Geoffrey Boleyn, who rose from apprentice hatter, to freeman of the city, to wealthy mercer, to member of parliament, to alderman, to Lord Mayor of London, the Boleyn family soon rose from humble Norfolk origins to high ranking nobility, and eventually married into royalty, and finally, with a Boleyn (Elizabeth I) ruling as Monarch. It is ironic to think that in just six generations from the family would go from prosperous peasant in Salle Norfolk, to succeeding to the throne of England in their own right. No other family in history have risen so high, fallen so greatly, only to rise again.

Ironically, Queen Elizabeth II, the current Monarch of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is also descended from the Boleyn family, through Mary Boleyn's daughter Catherine Carey (mentioned above). So the humble Boleyn ancestors from Norfolk, still have a descendant on the throne today.

Julie Szuster says

This is a great book. One would ask therefore why I rated it 2 stars? Because, unfortunately it is also , in my opinion, a book for those of us who are writing maybe some kind of PhD, maybe some article. It's a little too boring for a "normal" person :(

Mariana says

My love for Boleyn women only grew more reading Elizabeth Norton's book. As you can expect, it's about the Boleyn women, from the first one that rose to predominance in the fourteenth century to Queen Elizabeth I, and all her cousins through Mary Boleyn.

It was a lighter book that I expected but it was appreciated nevertheless because I read it in less time than I usually take with historic non fiction. It was my first time reading something from Elizabeth Norton and I was not disappointed, I'll be sure to read more of hers.
