

HERITAGE CIRCLE

Tony Diamond, The Six Wives of Henry VIII

Tony Diamond presented the lives of the six wives of Henry VIII and gave an insight into their characters in his humorous talk to the May meeting of the Heritage Circle. Whereas he was in sympathy with most of these women, he dismissed Henry VIII as a 'tyrant.'

Henry's first wife, Katherine of Aragon arrived in England in 1501 aged 16 to marry Henry's elder brother, Arthur. She was widowed within five months but her father-in-law, Henry VII, kept her in England as a virtual prisoner so as not to lose her considerable dowry. When Henry VIII succeeded to the throne in 1509 he decided to marry Katherine. This was problematic. The Pope had to give permission for this but the Bible was contradictory about marriage to a brother's wife. The critical question was whether the marriage had been consummated. Henry claimed this had not happened and the Pope was encouraged to grant his consent. Katherine proved to be a popular queen with the people. She gained a huge victory over the Scots in the Battle of Flodden in 1513 while Henry was campaigning less successfully in France. She saved 31 apprentices from a gruesome death after a riot in 1517 but she failed to produce a son. The only child to survive from the marriage was Mary.

Henry was anxious to secure the succession with a male heir. He feared the political instability which had preceded the Tudor accession in 1485. Eventually, Henry decided to divorce Katherine on the grounds that her first marriage had been consummated. Katherine was confined to Kimbolton Castle until her death in 1536. In the interim, Henry married Anne Boleyn.

Anne too only produced a daughter, Elizabeth, which led Henry to become disenchanted with their relationship by 1536. A sympathetic view of Anne was presented. She has tended to be condemned by history but Tony Diamond thinks that she was not guilty of the charges of adultery, incest and witchcraft which led to her execution. Within one day, Henry had married Jane Seymour. This time the couple appear to have been happy. She gave birth to a son, Edward, but died shortly afterwards. Henry commemorated her in various art works and was eventually buried alongside her in St George's Chapel in Windsor.

Henry waited three years before his next marriage in 1540 to Anne of Cleves. She too has been disparaged by history in the view of Tony Diamond. Henry took an instant dislike to her, possibly because she had led such a sheltered life that she could not engage with his humour. After their annulled marriage, Henry treated Anne with generosity. She lived at Hever Castle and he referred to her as his 'loving sister'. Anne is the only wife of Henry to be buried Westminster Abbey.

Katherine Howard was only married to Henry for just over a year before being charged with adultery and executed in 1541. Whereas Anne Boleyn was 'framed' in Tony Diamond's opinion, Katherine was probably guilty.

Finally, Henry married Katherine Parr in 1543. She was 31 and had been widowed twice. She was a very accomplished woman. She managed to outlive Henry despite a scare in 1546 when she was accused of witchcraft. After Henry's death in 1547 she married Thomas Seymour before she died in childbirth in 1548 at Wolf Hall.

The evening concluded questions from the floor which led to an interesting discussion of issues surrounding the crisis in 1936 and the future of the monarchy.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be at 7.30pm on Wednesday 25 June at Rickinghall Village Hall when David Cawell presents *And the Bands Played On* – a tribute to village and town bands that survived the First World War. New members and visitors are welcome. Further information about the Heritage Circle is available on its website, www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net.

Gerry Gurhy