

THE MANY FACES OF ANNE BOLEYN

The appearance of Anne Boleyn has been under discussion for centuries, from the earliest sixteenth century descriptions to today's technological findings. The only contemporary image of Anne that survives is a disfigured commemorative lead medallion inscribed 'A.R. The Moost Happi. Anno 1534', held at the British Museum (fig 1). However, recent research undertaken by Amit Roy-Chowdhury, head of the video computing group at the University of California in Riverside, suggests otherwise.



Figure 1 'Moost Happi' medal, 1534, British Museum (M.9010)

Roy-Chowdhury created the algorithm after being approached by a history student who was interested to see if facial recognition technology could be applied to art history. Advanced technology was used to compare the face on the *Moost Happi* medal with a number of paintings. Although this image of Anne is undoubtedly from her lifetime, one must still question its validity as a true likeness of Anne. Is this what she really looked like? The medal celebrated her pregnancy when she was believed to be carrying a male heir, so what were the motives behind the creation of this image? Was it a propaganda piece to try and stimulate some affection amongst the population? In England medals never really became as popular as miniatures. There were very few English medals produced.

Despite the damage to the lead medallion, the new technology found a close match with the privately owned Nidd Hall portrait, held at the Bradford Art Galleries and Museums. The Nidd Hall portrait has often been thought to be Jane Seymour, Henry VIII's third wife. This can be seen if one compares the Nidd Hall portrait (fig 2) to an image of the portrait of Jane Seymour (fig 3) on display in the Queens' Chamber at Hever Castle. The headdress, jewellery and Jane's distinct chin are very similar to the Nidd Hall portrait.



Figure 2 Nidd Hall portrait, Bradford Art Galleries and Museums



Figure 3 Jane Seymour, after Hans Holbein, 16th century, Hever Castle Ltd

Tudor portraiture is a complex subject: it is not merely the artist detailing the sitter's features as accurately as possible. Portraiture was the product of collaboration between several different people with different interests, concerns, and beliefs. One has to appreciate that, as with varying contemporary descriptions of Anne Boleyn, posthumous portraits are subject to the motives of the artist, the sitters, the patron and the recipient. Facial recognition technology will not be able to decipher the intentions behind the portraits. Roy-Chowdhury does provide a word of warning however. "What the computer provides at the end is another source of evidence into the discussions that have been going on about these questions. It should not be construed that the computer knows the answer."¹

At Hever Castle we have several portraits of Anne Boleyn on display to our visitors. Most date, or are derivations, from the latter half of the sixteenth century. Many portraits would have originated from sets of Henry VIII's wives, and would have been commissioned as part of an historical story, often shown in the Long Galleries of wealthy families. Anne is often shown as the wicked witch character that had such influence over Henry that he broke with Rome in order to marry her.² This is evident in the black dress, dark hair, cold eyes and pale skin shown in our most well-known image of Anne (fig 4).

¹ *Portraits of Anne Boleyn may not be her, say experts*, by Sarah Knapton, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/11414222/Portraits-of-Anne-Boleyn-may-not-be-her-say-experts.html>, accessed on 17 February 2015

² Grosvenor, B., *Lost Faces: Identity and Discovery in Tudor Royal Portraiture*, 2007, p.59.



Figure 4 Anne Boleyn, English School, c.1550, Hever Castle Ltd



Figure 5 Anne Boleyn, late sixteenth century, National Portrait Gallery (NPG 668)



Figure 6 Anne Boleyn, late sixteenth century, National Portrait Gallery (NPG 4980(15))

This portrait-type, similar to the National Portrait Gallery's versions (figs 5 and 6), complements the harsh Catholic views of the latter half of the sixteenth century. In 1585 Nicholas Sanders, a recusant priest, wrote: "Anne Boleyn was rather tall of stature, with black hair, and an oval face of a sallow complexion, as if troubled with jaundice. She had a projecting tooth under the upper lip, and on her right hand six fingers."³ The idea of a lady with black hair, a tooth projecting from under her lip and six fingers on one hand creates a rather monstrous picture, which of course, is the image that Anne's enemies would want to portray.

However, one must question Sanders' reliability, he was only nine years old when Anne was executed and never met her. Writing forty-nine years later he contradicts his earlier comments and says "She was handsome to look at, with a pretty mouth, amusing in her ways, playing well on the lute, and was a good dancer. She was the model and the mirror of those who were at court, for she was always well dressed, and every day made some change in the fashion of her garments."⁴

Contemporary sources reveal a rather different image of Anne. Writing in 1536 the poet Lancelot de Carle remarked that Anne was 'beautiful and with an elegant figure...' and 'she became so graceful that you would never have taken her for an Englishwoman, but for a Frenchwoman born,' and also 'her (black) eyes, which she well knew how to use. In truth such was their power that many a man paid his allegiance.'⁵

Francesco Sanuto, the Venetian Ambassador, wrote that "Madam Anne is not one of the handsomest women in the world; she is of middling stature, swarthy [dark] complexion, long neck, wide mouth, bosom not much raised, and in fact has nothing but the English King's great

³ Sanders, N., *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, 1585, translation by D. Lewis, 1877, p25.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Épistre Contenant le Procès Criminel Faict à l'Encontre de la Roynie Anne Boullant d'Angleterre* (A Letter Containing the Criminal Charges Laid Against Queen Anne Boleyn of England).

appetite, and her eyes, which are black and beautiful, and take great effect on those who served the Queen [Catherine] when she was on the throne."⁶ It is likely that her hair colour was probably brunet as recorded by the poet and her admirer Thomas Wyatt in his sonnet *If waker care, if sudden pale colour* where Anne is referred to as "Brunet".⁷



Figure 7 Anna Bollein Queen, Francesco Bartolozzi, 18th century, Hever Castle Ltd

In their article, 'An old tradition reasserted: Holbein's portrait of Queen Anne Boleyn', John Rowlands and David Starkey argue that the chalk drawing by Hans Holbein, now in the Royal Collection, is the true face of Anne Boleyn.⁸ We have an eighteenth century copy by Francesco Bartolozzi on display in Anne Boleyn's Bedroom (fig 7). On first glance this portrait does not look like the woman that Henry changed the religion of the country for. However, if one looks at the inscription in the top left corner, "Anna Bollein Queen", it begins to reveal its true identity. Although the inscription is not contemporary, in an early reference (1590) we are told it was 'subscribed' by Sir John Cheke, Edward VI's tutor, Henry VIII's physician and whose patron was Anne Boleyn.⁹ Cheke would have known most of Holbein's sitters, if not personally, at least on a visual level. In 1544 Cheke became tutor to Edward VI and it was probably at this time that the sitters were identified for the benefit of the young prince, who took a keen interest in Holbein's drawings.

The drawing matches contemporary descriptions of Anne Boleyn. An account of Anne's coronation in 1533 described the new Queen as wearing "a violet velvet mantle, with a high ruff

⁶ 'Venice: October 1532', in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 4, 1527-1533, ed. Rawdon Brown (London, 1871), pp. 355-368

⁷ *Book of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, Egerton Ms. 2711, f.66v, British Library.

⁸ Rowlands, J., Starkey, D., 'An old tradition reasserted: Holbein's portrait of Queen Anne Boleyn', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 125, No. 959, Feb., 1983, p.88

⁹ This was one of over eighty such drawings once all bound together in "A great booke of Pictures doone by Haunce Holbeyne of certyn Lordes, Ladyes, gentlemen and gentlewomen in King Henry the 8: his tyme, their names subscribed by Sr John Cheke secretary to King Edward the 6 wch booke was King Edward the 6." The Lumley Inventory ("Red Velvet Book"), compiled in 1590 by John Lampton.

of gold thread and pearls, which concealed a swelling she has, resembling a goitre¹⁰. This is also mentioned by Sanders fifty-two years later: "There was a large wen [cyst] under her chin, and therefore to hide its ugliness she wore a high dress covering her throat".¹¹ In this drawing her chin and neck area are prominent suggesting a swelling in the throat glands, which is partly hidden by the high neckline of her chemise. It was also common for people of high rank to be seen in simple costume. Henry VIII was known to receive visitors 'in a nyght gown'.¹²



Figure 8 Portrait of a Lady, Hans Holbein, c.1530s, British Museum (1975,0621.22)



Figure 9 Anna Bullen Regina Angliae, Wenceslaus Hollar 1649, British Museum (1868,0822.6051)



Figure 10 Anne Bullen, after Holbein, Hever Castle Ltd

¹⁰ 'Henry VIII: June 1533, 1-5', *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Volume 6: 1533 (1882), pp. 262-275.

¹¹ Sanders, N., *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, 1585, translation by D. Lewis, 1877, p25

¹² Rowlands, J., Starkey, D., 'An old tradition reasserted', p.91.

In another drawing by Holbein, claiming to be Anne Boleyn, the sitter is clearly very different to the Cheke image (fig 8). The drawing, now in the collection of the British Museum, was inscribed as Anne in a seventeenth century hand and was later engraved by Wenceslaus Hollar in 1649 (fig 9). The inscription can be traced no earlier than the date of the etching, when it was in the collection of the Earl of Arundel. At Hever Castle we have a painting based on this portrait style, purchased from Warwick Castle by William Waldorf Astor at the beginning of the twentieth century. The portrait is on display in the Inner Hall and is labelled 'Anne Bullen' (fig 10).

It seems most likely that the Cheke image (fig 7) is the closest likeness to the real Anne Boleyn. It closely matches contemporary descriptions as opposed to the traditional image of Anne (figs 4-6) which is based on later reports written by her opponents. It seems that Anne Boleyn is as mysterious today as she was in the sixteenth century.