

Portrait of Catherine by Michael Sittow (1502)



Quest for a lost Queen

Inspired by the hit TV drama *Wolf Hall*, **Graham Sherwood** goes in search of historical sites associated with Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's 'pomegranate Queen'

CERTAIN BRITISH TV dramas have a big appeal to audiences, especially overseas, due to their use of iconic filming locations that show off our country's best assets to the full.

The BBC's latest historical heavyweight, *Wolf Hall*, the hugely successful dramatisation of Hilary Mantel's Booker Prize-winning tome, could become the inspiration for a tour just as *Inspector Morse* has done for Oxford and *Downton Abbey* for many of our stately homes, including the location at Highclere Castle in Berkshire.

Detailing the political machinations of Thomas Cromwell and Henry VIII, *Wolf Hall* features the life, rise to power and eventual demise of both Catherine of Aragon and subsequently Anne Boleyn.

In addition to the well-known palaces in and around London that have hosted our royalty throughout the ages, such as Hampton Court and Windsor Castle, Catherine of Aragon during her latter years took a journey to some far less salubrious destinations before her early death in 1536.

It's a trail north from London through the home counties to her eventual resting place in Peterborough Cathedral. Some of the places she visited, first in triumph then in exile from the royal court, still exist in part. If your interest was raised by

the TV drama, here are some of the places where you can perhaps get a flavour of the 'pomegranate Queen'.

Following the untimely death of her first husband, Henry VIII's older brother Arthur, Prince of Wales, and widowed at the tender age of 16, Catherine of Aragon was placed in residence at **Durham House**, London, until a decision could be made about what was to become of her. For a time it looked as if her destiny would be a return to Spain, as unwanted merchandise. However, following a papal agreement that her first marriage to Henry's brother had not been

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Bishop Thomas Hatfield built the opulent town house Durham House around 1345. It had a large chapel and a high-ceilinged Great Hall that was supported by marble pillars. Opening on to the highly fashionable Strand, its gatehouse led on to a large courtyard. The hall and chapel faced the entrance, while the private apartments overlooked the

Scots, and was riding towards the north to put herself at the head of the troops before the victory of Flodden Field ended the campaign.

It is said that Catherine received the blood-soaked tunic of James IV of Scotland at **Woburn Abbey** in Bedfordshire, before sending it as a trophy to her husband who was still fighting in France.

However, as is well documented

Peterborough Cathedral: Catherine's final resting place

Below right: The Old Palace in the grounds of Hatfield House



◀ Catherine, despite her best efforts, could not deliver a viable male heir to the throne, suffering several unsuccessful pregnancies that resulted in still-births and those that survived for merely days.

Catherine soon found herself falling out of favour with Henry VIII and, while still enjoying the goodwill of the population who thought her to be a true and pious queen, began to become increasingly isolated from the centre of court life.

While Henry sought every possible way to dissolve his unproductive marriage, Catherine was forced to continually move from place to place, with seemingly ever-decreasing levels of comfort.

The More (also known as the Manor of the More) was a 16th-century palace near Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, where Catherine lived after the annulment of her marriage to Henry. It was previously owned by Cardinal Wolsey, and was located at the north-east corner of the later More Park estate on the edge of the River Colne flood plain.

The house came to Wolsey as a possession of the Abbey of St Albans in 1515, and passed to Henry VIII in 1531. By the mid-16th century, there was a timber-framed long gallery 15ft broad and 253ft long. Most of the house was made of brick. Catherine came to live at The More

in the winter of 1531/32, but in May 1532 she was forced to leave and travel to Bishops Hatfield.

The More site was partly excavated between 1952 and 1955 and is currently provide a playing field for Northwood Preparatory School, which lies immediately to the east. The site was also the subject of an episode of the popular British archaeology programme, *Time Team*, in 2012.

The Old Palace at Hatfield House is located in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, 20 miles north of London. Hatfield's full name, **Bishop's Hatfield**, derives its name

from the palace of the bishops of Ely that was built in the 12th century.

The Old Hatfield House was built of lovely red brick around 1485 by Bishop Morton. In 1538, Thomas Goodrich, Bishop of Ely, gave the palace to Henry VIII in exchange for other lands. As one of the King's residences, it conveniently became one of the many places where Catherine of Aragon was incarcerated during the couple's divorce proceedings. Much of the Old Palace still remains within the grounds of Hatfield House and is used for events and functions today.

The Priory Church of St Peter with its monastery, **Dunstable Priory**, was

founded in 1132 by Henry I for the Augustinian canons in Dunstable, Bedfordshire. St Peter's today is a large and impressive building, but this is only the nave of what remains of an originally much larger Augustinian priory church.

The monastic buildings consisted of a dormitory for the monks, an infirmary, stables, workshops, bakehouse, brewhouse and buttery. There was also a hostel for pilgrims and travellers, the remains of which is known today as Priory House. Opposite the Priory was one of the royal palaces belonging to Henry I, known as Kingsbury.

Although there seems to be little

historical documentation from its earlier years, in the 16th century the Priory was again connected with an important historical event, when on May 23, 1533, in the Lady Chapel of the conventual church at Dunstable, Archbishop Cranmer together with the bishops of Winchester, London, Bath and Lincoln pronounced the marriage between Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon null and void. The location arose as Catherine was then residing at nearby Ampthill, some 12 miles to the north.

The Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk were sent to **Ampthill Castle** to tell Catherine that Henry and Anne Boleyn were now



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Main picture: The tranquil River Nene at Fotheringhay with the mound that was the castle behind the willows
Top: Woburn Abbey, where Catherine enjoyed her better moments, looks significantly different than it would have in Catherine's day as in 1747 the 4th Duke hired Henry Flitcroft to turn rebuild the house in the Palladian style
Left: Buckden Towers, incorporating part of the old Bishop's Palace
Centre: Kit Williams hid the treasure promised by his book at Ampthill, near Catherine's memorial cross

WOBURN ABBEY IMAGE PUBLISHED BY KIND PERMISSION OF HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF BEDFORD AND THE TRUSTEES OF THE BEDFORD ESTATE

married; she was told that as she was now no longer queen she must use the title Princess Dowager of Wales. She would be allowed to keep her property but her servants and household expenses would now be her own responsibility.

However, she was also informed that if she submitted to the King's will and recognised her new situation, she would be more generously provided for with a handsome estate. Catherine declined and Henry, furious with her continued obstinacy, ordered her to move to the Bishop of Lincoln's Palace at Buckden in Huntingdonshire. Nothing remains today

of Ampthill Castle, which was built in the 15th century by Sir John Cornwall, Lord Fanhope, from ransom proceeds following the battle of Agincourt. There is, however, a commemorative cross for Catherine of Aragon in the park at Ampthill, which was also chosen as the burial site for the 'golden hare' treasure that accompanied the children's fantasy puzzle book, *Masquerade*, written by author, artist and illustrator Kit Williams in 1979.

Buckden Towers, formerly known as **Buckden Palace**, is a 12th-century fortified manor house, located on High Street, Buckden, in Cambridgeshire,

although it is often stated as being built much later, in the 15th century. However, the first wooden palace was actually built in the late 12th century and records show it as being an additional home to the bishops of Lincoln.

The wooden structure was replaced by more substantial buildings, including a tall brick tower which was added in 1475, protected by walls, a moat, and surrounded by an outer bailey. Catherine resided here in somewhat uncomfortable surroundings for almost a year between July 1533 and May 1534.

The tower and some of the walls are still

visible from the village High Street. Catherine complained about the damp and cold of Buckden and she was offered a move to Fotheringhay Castle in Northamptonshire. This was thought to be worse, so she declined. It became famous later as the site of the imprisonment and execution of Mary Queen of Scots. The castle mound is all that remains – a stark reminder of that bloody history. Visitors can walk up to the mound close by the banks of the River Nene.

Catherine arrived at **Kimbolton Castle** in May 1534 and stayed there for what

would turn out to be the last 20 months of her life. It is now home to Kimbolton public school and, while some of the castle remains as Catherine would have known it, most of the building has been heavily altered, including work by 18th century luminaries like Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor and Robert Adam.

Held effectively as a prisoner within modest quarters in the south-western corner of the castle and tended by a small entourage of the faithful, Catherine still regarded herself as Queen, even though Henry had given orders that she now be addressed merely as Princess Dowager,

being the widow of his deceased brother. The Queen's Room, where Catherine died in 1536, aged 50, most probably from cancer of the heart, is now the school headmaster's study. After being embalmed by the local candle-maker she lay in the chapel for nearly three weeks before being taken on her final journey for burial at what is now Peterborough Cathedral, resting at Sawtry Abbey en route.

Today few other than the local population are aware of Peterborough Cathedral's association with Henry's Spanish queen, who was buried at what was then known as **Peterborough Abbey**



The gatehouse at Kimbolton School. Catherine of Aragon died in the castle, in what is now the headmaster's study

“Today, scholars debate whether it was the presence of Catherine’s tomb at Peterborough Abbey that saved it from the ravages of Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries”

after a lavish funeral. Henry had always sensed that Catherine enjoyed a great deal of sympathy and affection from much of the country’s population who loved her for her piety and dignity and who felt after the divorce that she had been hard done by. So despite her reduced circumstances towards the end of her marriage, she was given an elaborate funeral on January 29, 1536, which was presided over by no fewer than four bishops and six abbots.

Somewhat unusually, the city holds an annual festival marking the anniversary of her death with a Catholic mass being celebrated, a rarity in an Anglican cathedral.

Her original 16th century tomb was, similarly, an elaborate affair of black marble boasting gilded lettering and other decoration. Sadly, Oliver Cromwell’s soldiers stole the gilding during the sack of the cathedral in the Civil War in 1643. Even more heinously, a dean of the cathedral used the marble slab of the tomb for the floor of his summerhouse during the 1700s.

The marble tomb the visitor sees today is the result of a nationwide appeal during the late 19th century made by Catherine

Clayton, wife of one of the cathedral’s canons, who beseeched all the Catherines of England to help restore the Queen’s tomb to its original splendour.

The cathedral now marks the funeral date with the Catherine of Aragon Festival on the Friday and Saturday nearest January 29 each year, when a representative from the Spanish Embassy is invited to a civic service on the Friday and a special Catholic mass is held on the Saturday. Children are encouraged to dress in Tudor costume, and learn how people lived in the early 16th century from historic re-enactors.

Tributes of flowers, and Catherine’s heraldic symbol, the pomegranate, are laid on her tomb. She had chosen the fruit when she was still a young princess in Spain, somewhat ironically because to the medieval world it symbolised fertility.

Today, scholars debate whether it was the presence of Catherine’s tomb at Peterborough Abbey that saved it from the ravages of Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries.

While there is as much disagreement as assertion to this theory, perhaps Henry does shed some light on his real affections

Passport to the Catherine of Aragon trail

■ Woburn Abbey is open daily during the summer and autumn seasons. For further information see (www.woburnabbey.co.uk), tel: 01525 290333

■ Hatfield House is open to the public, and tours of the Old Palace can be booked at ticketing points when it is not being used for a function. For information on opening times and prices, see: (www.hatfield-house.co.uk), tel: 01707 287010

■ Ampthill Great Park is off the B530 Woburn Street, west of Ampthill town centre. It is on part of the Greensand Ridge Walk, and a brochure about the park and how to get there is available to download from the website: (www.greensandtrust.org), tel: 01234 743666

■ Kimbolton Castle is open to the public twice a year. The next openings are Sunday November 1, and then Sunday March 6 next year. Admission £5, seniors £4, children £2.50. Groups can book tours at other times subject to school usage. Details from: (www.kimbolton.cambs.sch.uk), tel: 01480 860505

■ Peterborough Cathedral is closed only on Boxing Day. For details of opening hours and visitor information, see the website: (www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk), tel: 01733 355315.



The village of Kimbolton

for Catherine – who, after all, ruled as his Queen longer than all his other wives put together – through his biographer, who quotes him thus:

“She is, my lords, as true, as obedient, as conformable a wife as I could in my phantasy wish or desire. She hath all the virtues and qualities that ought to be in a woman of her dignity or in any other of baser estate.”