

## Researching Tudor History

Many different kinds of people find themselves embarking on research into Tudor history – Tudor history bloggers, novelists, non-fiction writers, re-enactors, armchair enthusiasts, teachers, people wanting to find out more about a person or event after reading a novel or seeing a film, people tracing their family tree, students... etc. and unless you are doing a history course or have a friendly historian on tap then it can be difficult to make that first step and to stay on the right path.

There are many challenges for the amateur history researcher:

- Time
- Money
- Knowing which history books to trust
- Knowing how to move on from history books to historical sources
- Knowing where to find sources
- Taking into account bias and interpretation
- Language – Latin, French, Old English...
- Dates
- Handwriting
- Figuring out context

Phew! It's quite a minefield. But, once you get into it you'll find it strangely addictive and you'll find yourself missing meals and ignoring loved ones because you've just found the source you've been looking for for 2 weeks!

What's great is that many historical documents have been transcribed and put online now, as have many old books which are copyright. People really can research the Tudor period from anywhere in the world, although there's nothing quite like seeing documents 'in the flesh'. One author recently said that “when historical sources are easily accessible to everyone, history can be interpreted by us all” but not everybody has the expertise to interpret historical sources. It is so easy to think a source is saying what you want it to say or to put your trust in a source which is actually fake, so it is important to double check things or get advice before you go public with a new theory or controversial find.

Apologies to those of you who have some expertise in the area of researching history, but I'm now going to take you through the method I use to research history, step-by-step...

### ***Choose Your Topic***

Some of you may not have a choice with this as it could be that you've been asked to research and write about a particular topic or you may have found a particular person in your family tree, but if you're a history blogger then you might have the whole of Tudor history to draw from. Think about what issues people discuss online, what piques their interest, is there something that is hot at the moment because of a TV programme or novel? Is there something that piques your interest, that you want to get to the bottom of, that you feel passionate about? If you have a blog or Facebook page, ask your followers what they want to know about. Brainstorm and just let the ideas flow.

For this webinar, I'm going to choose Anne Boleyn's faith as an example. I'm always being asked about Anne's religion, her role in the Reformation and whether she was actually a Protestant, plus it's a subject that interests me. I'm going to talk about how I went about researching Anne's faith.

## ***The Starting Point - Find a reputable secondary source***

What is THE go-to book on that topic?

When I first became interested in Anne Boleyn I searched on Amazon for “Anne Boleyn” and was confronted with a list of quite a few books. I could rule out quite a few because they were novels rather than non-fiction but that still left me with quite a few to choose from. I narrowed it down by:

- Reading reviews
- Googling the author and finding out what their level of expertise was in the subject and what was being said about them
- Looking at what else the author had written – Had they written other books on that subject?
- Using the “look inside” feature on Amazon and seeing what the book covered. Did it cover the topic I was researching? Did it have references and a bibliography that I could use to extend my research into the topic? If you're in a bookshop then obviously you can physically look inside the book!
- Looking at the publication date – Was it a recent book? Had it been updated since publication? We can't rule out older books just because they're old, but sometimes books become outdated when there has been a recent discovery or breakthrough. One example is the recent find of Richard III's remains.

One of the first books I bought on Anne Boleyn was, fortunately, Eric Ives's biography of Anne, “The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn”. It actually doesn't have many Amazon reviews, only 34 when I looked a few days ago on Amazon UK, but the book fits my criteria because

- It is recent – It was published in 2005, having been updated from a slightly earlier version. OK, now we're in 2015 it's not that recent, but it's a lot more recent than Friedmann's 19<sup>th</sup> century book!
- It is described as “A full biography of Anne Boleyn, based on the latest scholarly research” and as presenting “evidence about Anne’s spirituality”.
- The reviews are good – Amazon reviews can be a minefield but this book has positive reviews written by people who sound knowledgeable about the period. The blurb also have review comments from other historians praising the book.
- The “Look Inside” feature allows me to look at “About the Author” where Ives is described as “Emeritus Professor of English History at the University of Birmingham”. It goes on to say that he has written widely on Tudor history and was awarded an OBE for services to history. The Table of Contents shows me that there are two chapters of interest to someone researching Anne Boleyn's faith - “The Advent of Reform” and “Personal Religion”. I can also see that there are many pages of Notes, a section of Bibliographical abbreviations and a full index.
- I googled Eric Ives and find that he's written many historical journal articles on the period, other books on the period and is a recognised authority on Anne Boleyn and Tudor history.

When it comes to ordering the book you may have the option of buying it as an e-book or as a paperback or hard copy. Now, I do have some research books on my Kindle but I find researching a book much easier when I have a real physical copy of it. Yes, you can highlight and bookmark ebooks, and add notes, but I still find it easier to stick post it notes on pages, turn corners down (sacrilege!) and find things in a physical book. References are just too hard to follow on an e-reader for me. However, if the cost of the physical book is prohibitive then I'm happy to suffer and just have the ebook.

## **Reading the Book**

When the book arrives, here are the steps I go through:

- Read the whole book – OK, this may be a bit of a chore but you get to know the author's style, you might pick up new information that you didn't know about the event or person that may be useful for other research another time, and you might pick up useful information that is outside of the chapters/sections that you had chosen to read.
- Read the chapters/sections that are relevant to your topic – You might want to read them without taking notes first of all and then go back and “actively read” them with a pad and pen in hand. Make notes and make sure you write down page numbers so you can go back and find the relevant information. There's nothing worse than making a note of something really interesting and then not being able to find it again.
- Think about why the historian/author has come to that conclusion or theory and what they base their theory on. Do they give a reference so that you can look up the source for yourself to check that it really does back up what they are saying? You might not agree with the author when you read it for yourself and this is something that you can discuss in your own work.

## **Checking a Reference**

A good history book will be properly referenced and include a Notes section on each chapter. Here is an example from the “Personal Religion” chapter of Eric Ives' book. On page 284, Ives is discussing Anne's involvement in poor relief, something which was a concern of Christian humanists, and he writes of how one of Anne's chaplains, William Latymer, “provides the detail, with corroboration from elsewhere.” There is a little number 44 by that statement and that means that we can find out more about Ives' source for this information.

When I turn to the Notes section of Ives' book, I find that there is a section of notes for that chapter and number 44 says

“Latymer, 'Treatyse', ff. 25-7 [Dowling, 'Cronickille', pp. 51-4].”

That doesn't help much until I look it up in the Bibliographical Abbreviations section and find that “Dowling, 'Cronickille’” refers to “William Latimer's Cronickille of Anne Bulleyne', ed. Maria Dowling, in *Camden Miscellany*, xxx (Camden Soc. 4<sup>th</sup> ser. 39, 1990).”

## **Tracking Down a Source**

Now, Ives actually refers to this source a few times so it's definitely worth a look at, so I google it. What I find is lots of books on Google books citing the same reference! Not much help apart from showing me that the reference is correct and that it really exists! I know that a “miscellany” is a collection of works by different authors so I need to find the actual miscellany rather than looking for the “Cronickille”.

I know from the reference that its “Camden Miscellany XXX” and is in the 4<sup>th</sup> series volume 39 published in 1990. I therefore google “Camden Miscellany XXX”. Unfortunately, it's not available as an ebook or preview on Google books because it's too recent. Older books and documents can often be found on Google books or archive.org to read online or download, but I'm not in luck with this one.

However, I find it listed on Amazon and Abe Books. A used copy is £2.14 on Amazon UK so that suits me, I order it.

## **Found it!**

When it arrives I'm relieved to see that "William Latymer's Chronickille of Anne Bulleyne, Edited by Maria Dowling" is on the contents page – I've bought the right book! I can now look at pages 51-54 to check on Ives' reference and there I find Latymer giving details on Anne Boleyn's instructions to her almoners and chaplains concerning poor relief, names of people she helped and the ways in which she helped the poor – Maundy giving, providing clothes and bedding for people in need etc. I have gone to the horse's mouth now, from Eric Ives in the present day to the record of William Latymer who served Anne as a chaplain.

## **Online Sources**

I would do this for all the other references too. Some don't require me to buy another book because they can be found online, for example:

LP ix. 186 – This refers to "Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII" and specifically Volume 9 which covers the period August-December 1535. Letters and Papers can be found online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/Default.aspx> along with other documents like Calendar of State Papers, Spain etc.

I go to <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/Default.aspx> and hover over "Periods" on the menu, I then hover over "Timelines" and choose "Henry VIII". I move forward on the chart to 1535 and click on Letters and Papers Volume 9. That then takes me into the volume of documents. I need document 186 and that's going to be quite near the beginning so I pick "August 1535, 26-31" and there it is.

**Edit:** The British History Online website has been re-vamped and from the homepage you can browse "Full catalogue", "Guides and Calendars", "Primary Sources" and other sections. Letters and Papers can be found in "Guides and Calendars".

Online sources for documents and old books include, and I'll add links to the transcript of this webinar:

- British History Online, the site that I just mentioned as having Letters and Papers on it. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/> – Its collection also includes Calendar of State Papers: Spain, Journal of the House of Lords, Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice etc. and many other documents from different periods of British History. The majority are free to search and read.
- Memso from Tanner Ritchie Publishing – The records on Memso are not abridged like some of those on British History but you do have to pay a subscription to join and download documents as ebooks. They have an extensive manuscript collection though and it's worth joining for a short amount of time and downloading as much as you can - <http://www.tannerritchie.com/memso.php>
- <http://archive.org/index.php> – This is a wonderful website for old documents and books. It has all of the Tudor chronicles on it and many other out of copyright books, such as John Foxe's Book of Martyrs, the Love Letters of Henry VIII, Agnes Strickland's Queen of England etc. You can read books online or you can download them as ebooks or PDFs.
- Google Books – Another great place for older books or for seeing limited sections of newer books. I downloaded George Cavendish's two volume of The Life of Cardinal Wolsey from [books.google.com](http://books.google.com).
- Project Gutenberg - [http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page)

If the book you need is not available online then you may be able to find a second hand or antique copy for sale on Amazon, Abe Books or Ebay. I love Abe because it has a lot of rare books listed there - <http://www.abebooks.com/> It's worth price checking between sellers there and sellers on

Amazon though, and taking into account shipping.

## ***Moving On***

You should never rely on what one historian/author says about a person or event, however good they are at citing sources to back up their opinions, so the next thing to do is read another book on the subject. I know from reading Ives's chapters on Anne Boleyn's faith and checking his sources that other historians who write about Anne's religious views include Maria Dowling (in a journal article and a book), James Carley (in a book) and G W Bernard. Ives gives full references and I find Maria Dowling's book on Amazon and her article available for download at Cambridge Journals, Carley's book on Amazon and G W Bernard's book on Amazon. I then read those and dig into the sources they cite and it goes on and on until I feel that I have exhausted the topic.

I “google” anything else that comes up as I read. I use historic journal sites like <http://journals.cambridge.org/> , [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) and the English Historical Review - <http://ehr.oxfordjournals.org/> to search for journal articles on Anne Boleyn. I look into the reformists that wrote the books she read, anything that can give me more information on Anne's beliefs. I continue until I have come to my own conclusion, based on primary sources and the opinions of reputable historians, of Anne's faith.

It's time consuming but it's worth doing properly, particularly if you're going to be publishing your work. Other sources which you may find useful are:

- History Magazines – the archives of publications like History Today, BBC History Magazine etc.
- Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com) – This is a wonderful resource which contains over 57,000 biographies on “the people who shaped the history of the British Isles and beyond.” written by historians and experts. You may be able to access this free of charge at universities or libraries but if you cannot then it really is worth paying the subscription.  
For UK teachers/lecturers, the Oxford DNB also has a guide for using it with students, see <http://www.oup.com/oxforddnb/info/learning/>
- Dissertations – Search for PhD dissertations written on your chosen subject. These can be found at sites such as History Online - <http://www.history.ac.uk/history-online/> - or Proquest <http://www.proquest.co.uk/en-UK/> - or <http://www.historians.org/pubs/dissertations/index.cfm>
- Blogs and websites – Search for blog posts and website articles on your particular subject. Some bloggers go to a great deal of effort citing their references and you can also look at reader's comments too as many blog followers are just as knowledgeable, if not more, than the writer.

## ***Sources to be wary of***

The internet can be a researcher's best friend but you also have to be careful using it. Wikipedia, for example, has some really good pages with very accurate and trustworthy information, but it also has some rather dire pages. It is as good as the people who have added the information and edited it. For example, the Anne Boleyn page has Anne giving birth to a Henry, Duke of Cornwall who only survived for 2 minutes. It does not give a reference for this information and I have found no evidence to support this “fact”.

Google in general. I've mentioned it before on The Anne Boleyn Files, but if you google Anne Boleyn an information box pops up on the right hand side telling you that Anne was the mother of

Elizabeth I, Edward Tudor and Henry Tudor! Ooops!

Blogs – Obviously I don't mean The Anne Boleyn Files, but I think we all know that blogs are only as good as the person writing them. We all make mistakes, I make typos with dates and names, so it is easy for mistakes to get spread online. One person takes information from a blog post with a mistake in it and then publishes an article repeating that mistake and it goes on and on. I remember that a Wikipedia page had on it that the infant buried in the same vault as Jane Seymour and Henry VIII was the infant son of Anne Boleyn. I used to get so many emails about it and I did edit the Wikipedia page to get it changed to the infant son of Queen Anne, the Stuart Queen, as it was her son and not Anne Boleyn's. Things spread and get out of control online.

## ***Keep Your Notes Safe***

Do make sure that:

- Your notes make sense – You might come back to them years later so make sure that they are legible and understandable.
- They are retrievable - Keep all of your notes together in a place where you can find them again, whether it be in a physical cardboard file on a bookcase or in a file on your computer. Make sure that you can add to them easily.
- You keep a bibliography of all the books and documents you used for that project – I use my computer for my research and writing so I use Zotero, an open source programme which allows me to keep a bibliography and then use in-text citations which draw from this bibliography. As I find a book or document, I add it to Zotero. <http://www.zotero.org/>
- You make a note of the exact page of the document or book you used – You want to be able to cite the sources properly in your article, book or novel, and you never want to be in the situation where a reader asks you for a reference for a quotation and you can't find it.

## ***Compare sources and theories***

Once you've used a number of sources, you'll need to compare and contrast what they say. Do the sources corroborate each other? Do they differ? If so, how? Why would they differ? When handling sources that do differ, think about:

- Who wrote the source? Is it a primary source or is it a secondary source? Was the person actually there? Would they have first hand knowledge or are they repeating hearsay or gossip?
- Bias – Consider the writer's motives and whether they could be biased in any way.
- Whether the source is propaganda
- Does it have any discrepancies? The Spanish Chronicle, for example, is renowned for its inaccuracies and gossipy nature, so has to be taken with a pinch of salt.
- What kind of source is it? - A letter, legal document, chronicle... How accurate is it likely to be?
- What do reputable historians/experts have to say about this source?
- If it's a secondary source, what primary source does the writer rely on?

You'll also come across different theories. Historians can use exactly the same sources but interpret them differently. For example, in the case of Anne Boleyn's faith, we have Maria Dowling and Eric Ives portraying Anne as an evangelical reformer and G W Bernard seeing her as a closet Catholic who used religion for political means. Those are very different views and the way that I come to a conclusion on it is to read the sources for myself and see what I feel is the strongest case, or I could

come to a completely different conclusion. What theory do the sources support in your eyes?

## ***Using Your Research and Citing Sources***

How you use your research obviously depends on your purpose in researching the topic. I use my research to write articles, to do talks like this one, for books and for simply answering emails from visitors to my website or readers of my books, so it is essential that I keep track of what sources I use. Being organised with my notes helps me to be responsive to people because I know just where to look for the information and I can tell them where to look too. When someone argues against you, you can back up your view properly with a real credible source – you need the weapons when you go into battle!

Be careful when you turn your research into a book or an article that the work is yours and that you cite your sources properly. If you quote someone then say who it is and give a proper reference to their work. Don't just rehash their work and present it as yours, that's not fair. Some people think that they can paraphrase other people without citing them, but you can't. Even when quoting and citing your source, you have to be careful. There is the “fair use rule” which limits how much you can quote from a particular book without the copyright owner's permission. If the source is out of copyright then you don't need to worry about quoting but you still should say where you got it from.

Recently, I had some trouble with a website that was copying and pasting articles from my site and translating them into a different language. I complained, because obviously she was ripping off my work, so she then just stuck “The Anne Boleyn Files” at the end of her articles. I still complained because it frustrated me that she was not doing her own work and reproducing work that I'd done over a number of years. I don't mind people quoting from me, but to copy and paste whole articles is a bit too much.

Here is an example from one of my articles on Anne Boleyn and motherhood where I have used a statistic from a book. I have added the citation and the full details of the book would be in my “Notes and Sources” or Bibliography. You need to give credit where it is due.

## ***Presenting Your Research***

How you actually present your work will again depend on what it is that you're doing. A university or college will probably have a format that they want you to use for citations and bibliographies, so you'll need to stick to that. The Open University, for example, asks students to use in-text citations in brackets and then a bibliography or list of references at the end.

Books usually have numbered references and then footnotes (at the bottom of a page), end of chapter notes or a notes section at the end of the books. These notes and references are then followed by a bibliography of sources used. If you are free to choose your format, find what you like and then stick to it.

## ***Seeking Help***

Many historians and experts are on Twitter or Facebook, or have their own blogs, so it is easy to contact them for advice or feedback, or to ask them about their particular theory or a source they've used. Some will be too busy to answer, but others bend over backwards to help so it is worth contacting them. The worst they can do is tell you they're too busy or ignore you.

For help with particular sources, you could contact the institution that holds the document. I have always found the National Archives very helpful when looking for a particular source or wanting a copy of one. Don't be afraid to ask for help, that's what they're there for.

You could also contact the history department at a university or college to see if they can help you with your particular topic.

I'm not an academic but I'm always happy to help in any way that I can, even if it's just pointing you in the right direction for books or sources. When it comes to publishing your work, I'm also happy to offer advice and tips because I've been through it.

### ***Who knows where it will lead...***

Who knows where your research will take you. Some people research a topic with a specific goal in mind, such as a book or degree dissertation, whereas others just do it because they're curious. I started my research into Anne in 2009 out of curiosity and now I have a blog and books out there. It's the same with Natalie from the blog *On the Tudor Trail*, her research into Tudor places has turned into a joint book with Sarah Morris. I know people whose fascination with Tudor history and their research into it has turned into novels, plays and screenplays, it really is inspiring.