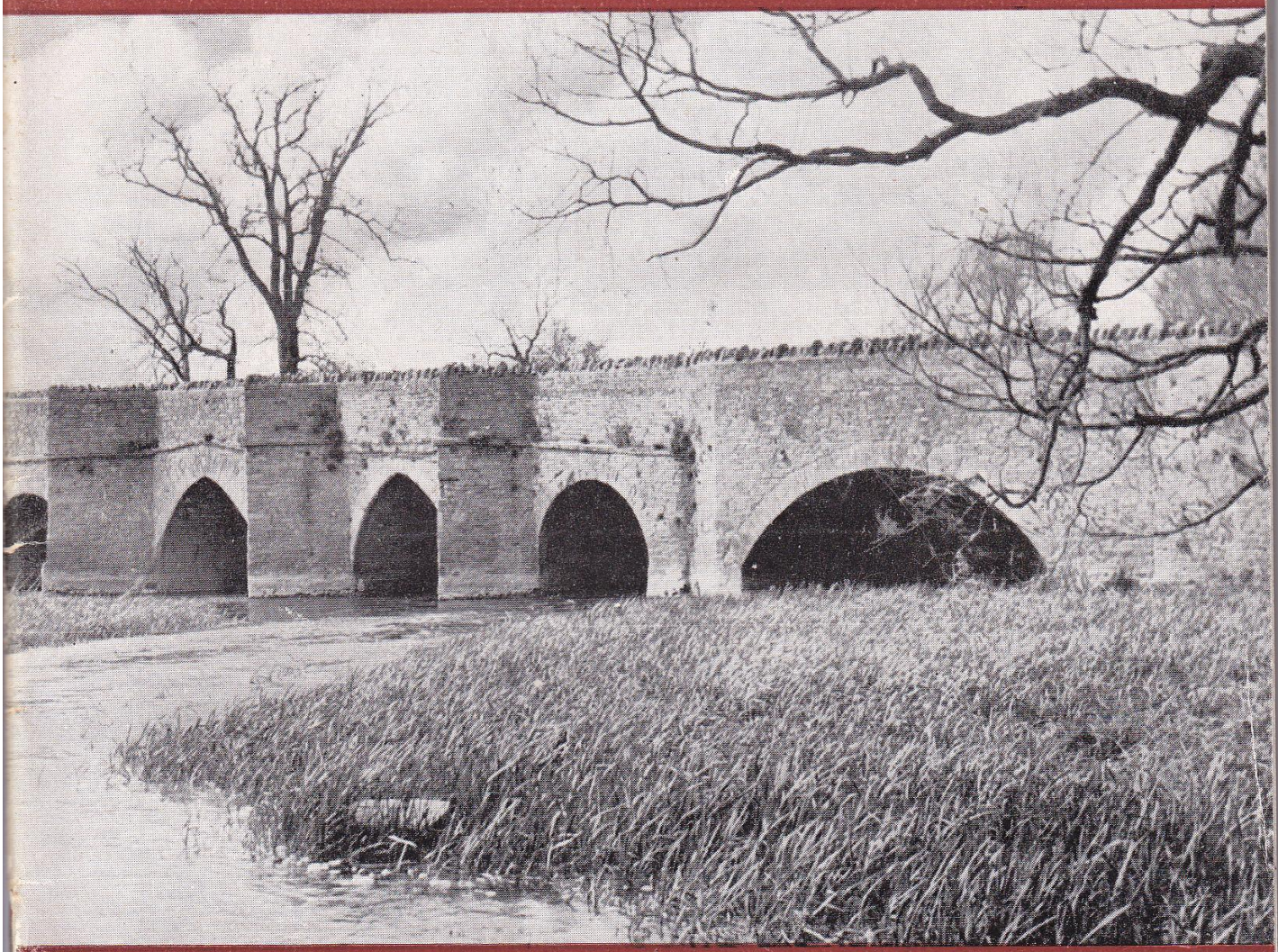
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KATHERINE OF ARAGON at Ampthill Castle

By Mary S. F. George

In days of old, here Ampthill's towers were seen,
The mournful refuge of an injur'd Queen.—H.W.

THE Infanta Katherine was a daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon and his wife, Isabella of Castile. The astute Henry VII of England valued the powerful Ferdinand's friendship and strove to cement it by the union of Arthur, Prince of Wales—a mere boy—and Katherine. In 1501 the marriage actually took place, but young Arthur died a few months later. Henry schemed to keep Katherine, with her dowry of two hundred thousand ducats, in England and after some opposition contrived that his second son, twelve-years'-old Henry, should espouse his brother's widow, with a special dispensation from the Pope.

Katherine was six years older than Henry, but as the prince grew to maturity she became much attached to the boisterous red-headed youth. This affection she retained to the end of her days. Henry, in his turn, is said to have had a respect for Katherine that he had for no other woman.

In 1509, at the age of eighteen, Henry succeeded his father as king. There was some misgiving as to the legality and propriety of a union between the King of England and his brother's widow, but Henry VIII decided to adhere to the arranged marriage and the wedding took place. It was said that Katherine appeared an attractive and youthful figure in her wedding gown, with sweetness of countenance and a gentle, although dignified, manner. The political effect of the union was important. There was now a united front of the Emperor Maximilian, Ferdinand and the Pope against Louis XII of France who was in league with Scotland.

For some twenty years the King was a good husband, although not infrequently he was away from his queen for periods. Five of their six children died as babies; the survivor was the Princess Mary, not the son so ardently desired by the monarch, who grew restive and uneasy at the blighting of his hopes. After a time Henry ceased to live with Katherine, although he frequently visited her.

In 1524, the Castle at Ampthill in Bedfordshire had been seized by the Crown, and the King soon viewed his new demesne and spent some time there. It is thought that it was to Ampthill that the Cardinal Legate journeyed from Rome to invest Henry with the order of 'Defender of the Faith' in return for some of Henry's anti-Lutheran writings. The king delighted in the sport he could enjoy at Ampthill and the Castle served as a hunting lodge. Among the attendants of Katherine was a newly-appointed maid-of-honour, Anne, the daughter of Sir Henry Boleyn. When Henry visited his queen he was attracted by Anne's vivacity and charm, and it was not long



Katherine of Aragon, from the painting in the National Portrait Gallery.

before he began to pay her marked attention. She was invited to accompany the royal party on hunting expeditions to Ampthill, and Anne, who was ambitious, played her cards well. She had no intention of allowing Henry to command her in any other manner than a strictly legal one, and soon it was rumoured that the king was seeking to divorce the Queen.

In 1528, Henry VIII wrote to Cardinal Wolsey that he had derived much benefit from a sojourn at Ampthill. His philanderings with the pretty Anne were, however, the subject of a protest by the Abbot of Woburn to the Pope. There was a local belief, the product, no doubt, of rustic imagination, that the great oak in Ampthill Park figured in Henry's romance. It was said the king rested, during an interval in the hunting, on one sturdy branch of the ancient tree, while the lively Anne climbed above him on to another.

Meanwhile Katherine was becoming more and more of an incubus to Henry. She steadfastly refused to consider the idea of divorce, and finally was banished from the Court and sent from Hertfordshire to Ampthill Castle. Divorce proceedings began, and Katherine appealed to the Pope himself for support. She spent her time in Ampthill quietly at her devotions, or working at embroidery at which she was very skilled, and wrote pathetic letters to her daughter, who was not allowed to visit her. Many stories have been told of her sojourn in Ampthill. One pleasing tale, related for a considerable time, says that she came from the Castle to a walled garden in the town of Ampthill, and there in a summer-house instructed the women of the place in making pillow-lace. Certainly there is an old lace pattern

called ' Katherine of Aragon.' It has a coarse linen thread running through it, not unlike Spanish lace. The garden with the old wall is still to be seen in Dunstable Street, but the building in it now is a seventeenth century garden-house. Certainly lace-makers have delighted to honour Katherine's memory for centuries, and on the feast of St. Katherine they baked ' Kattern's Cakes,' a custom extending beyond the confines of Bedfordshire.

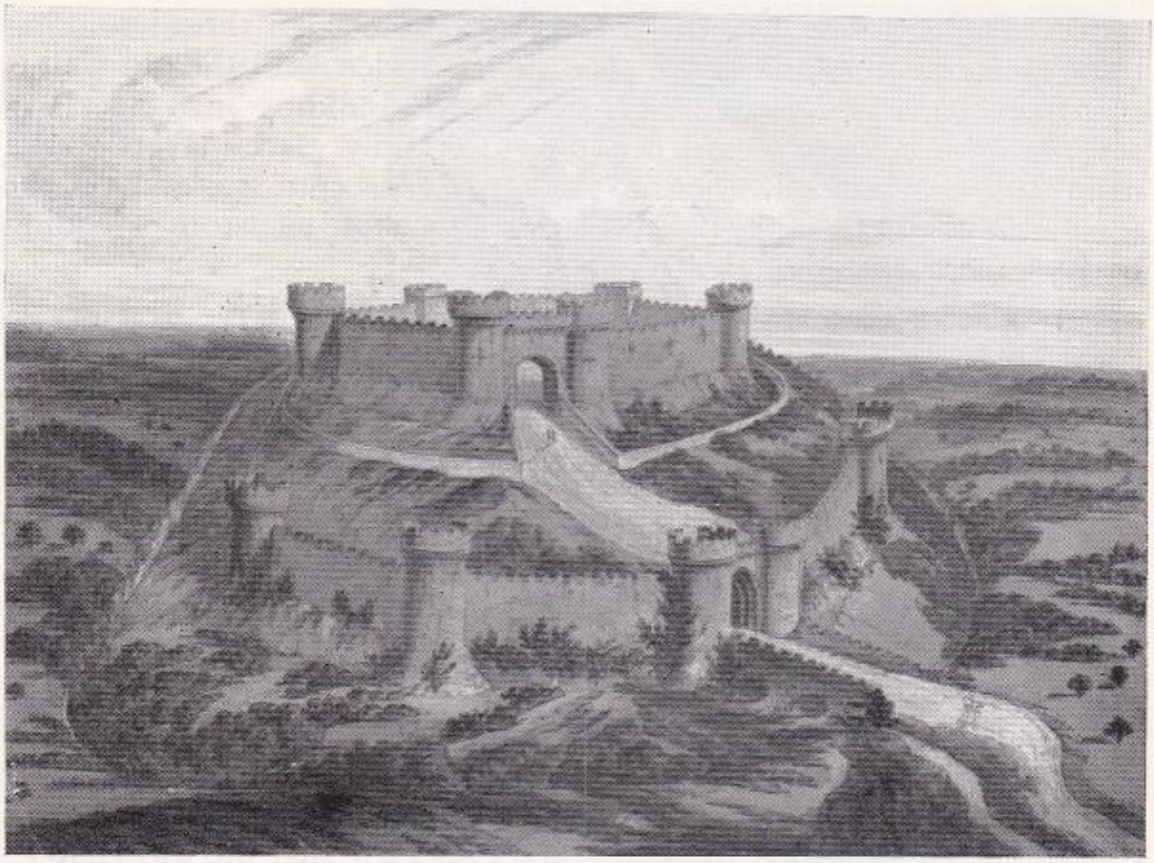
In attendance on the queen was Sir Nicholas Harve or Hervey, a member of a Thurleigh family. He died while at Ampthill in 1532, and is interred in the church there. The brass from his tomb, after an absence at Northill, was returned to Ampthill, and can now be seen on a stone slab affixed to the wall in the north aisle.

In appointing Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury, Henry had a man who would put the king's desires above all else, right or wrong. In May, 1533, the Archbishop presided at a Court at Dunstable Priory to consider the question of Henry's union with Katherine. Three times the queen was cited to appear. Each time she refused. On May 23rd the marriage was annulled.

Katherine refused to accept the position of a Princess Dowager or to rank as the King's sister-in-law. She would not even accept the title of Queen Dowager, but continued to declare that she was Henry's lawful wife. She left Ampthill in 1533 for Buckden, near Huntingdon, and the following year the enraged Henry decided to send her to one of her dower-houses, but Katherine with courage announced that ' they could hew her in pieces or bind her with ropes, but of her own free will



The garden retreat in Dunstable St., Ampthill, associated with Katherine of Aragon.



An old watercolour drawing of Ampthill Castle as described by Leland, in the Luton Museum collection.

she would never go.' Henry's haste had been such that he had wedded Anne Boleyn in secret in January 1533, the Archbishop being present. In June that year she was crowned Queen in London, with much ceremony.

At length, Katherine was sent by force to the Castle granted to the Wingfields at Kimbolton, a miserable pile in the Fen district, open to bitter winds. The damps of Kimbolton began to tell on her health very soon. It was a household of poverty but the King withheld the money necessary to keep the Queen in comfort. Her misery aroused much sympathy but it was in vain that Sir Edward Bedingfeld appealed for funds to run the household properly.

In 1533, in September, Anne's daughter, Elizabeth, was born and Katherine's daughter, the Princess Mary, was debarred from the succession.

The health of the tragic Queen steadily declined, and in 1536, she felt that her end was approaching. She sent Henry a letter, telling him that her eyes still desired him above all things, and beseeching him to deal kindly with their daughter Mary, and generously with her few, but faithful attendants. Henry was moved to tears by her message. He despatched the Spanish Ambassador to her deathbed. He and Lady Willoughby, a native of Castile, were with the Queen in her last hours. When news of Katherine's death reached Henry he declared that he would give her ' the finest tomb in Christendom ' and, economically enough, ordained that it should be Peterborough Abbey. Not until 1895, when the Katherines of England placed a

slab over the Queen's resting-place in the nave, did Henry's queen receive a personal monument.

The year 1536, which opened with the death of Katherine, was to close with the execution of Queen Anne Boleyn.

Katherine Howard, the fifth wife of Henry VIII, spent a short time at the Castle with the King and the Court. The beautiful but unprincipled successor of Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour and Anne of Cleves, may well have felt uneasy if Henry mentioned that two of his queens had already been at the Castle.

Ampthill was created a Royal Honour in 1542, but as time went on the King took little interest in the demesne, and the Castle fell into decay. It is known, however, that the young King, Edward VI, and his step-sister Elizabeth, spent a little while there, with their tutor, Dr. Cheke.

Horace Walpole, visiting his friends, the Earl and Countess of Upper Ossory at Ampthill, was much intrigued by the ruins of the Castle, not much more than grass mounds by the eighteenth century. He is said to have been closely, but not legally, related to the family to which Sir Nicholas Hervey had belonged. Walpole persuaded Lord Ossory to erect a memorial to the Queen on the summit of the hill in Ampthill Park, on the site of the Castle. He wrote to the Countess : 'I have sent an injunction to my antiquarian friend [the Revd. William Cole] to find me out a pattern of a genuine Cross, to be erected at Ampthill.'

James Essex designed the Cross, erected in 1773. It is pleasing and effective ; it stands on octagonal steps, with a tall shaft bearing a shield charged with the arms of Castile and Aragon. Walpole had doubts about its proportions, and wrote that 'it is not near large enough for the situation and would be fitter for a garden than a Park, but it is executed in the finest and best taste.'

Engraved on the base are his lines :

In days of old, here Ampthill's towers were seen,
The mournful refuge of an injur'd Queen.
Here flow'd her pure and unavailing tears,
Here blinded zeal sustained her sinking years,
Yet Freedom hence her radiant banner wav'd
And love aveng'd a realm by priests enslav'd ;
From Catherine's wrongs a nation's bliss was spread
And Luther's light from Henry's lawless bed.

The Cross stands solitary, dignified yet graceful, even as the Queen herself had stood looking out from the Castle hill towards London, forty miles away, where she had been happy as a young wife and mother.

What do you know? (*see page* 64)

1. 124.
2. The Picturedrome in December, 1929.
3. Francis Bacon's wife, Alice, at Eyworth.
4. STREATLEY.
5. In Bromham Road, opposite Conduit Road.
6. Houghton.
7. Roxton.
8. John, third Earl of Bute, at Luton Hoo.