

A lusty monarch

[Dr Kate Williams]

Henry VIII was well known as the lusty, powerful monarch who had six wives and broke with the Church of Rome. But his actions were also driven by vulnerability – his desperate desire for a son to secure his dynasty and his unrequited love for Anne Boleyn.

While Anne was living here at Hever Castle in the 1520s, Henry inundated her with love letters. I can just imagine her standing here looking out, waiting for the latest passionate words from the king.

And Henry was desperate to get her into his bed. He's writing to her here: "I send you this letter begging you to give me an account of the state you are in." And then he goes on to say: "I send you by this bearer, a buck killed late last night by my hand, hoping, when you eat of it, you will think on the hunter."

But Anne played hard to get. She didn't want to be one of his mistresses. She wanted to be the queen.

Henry was still married to Catherine of Aragon but he no longer loved her. She was the wrong side of 40 and had failed to bear him a male heir to secure his dynasty.

In contrast Anne was tempting and exotic. Groomed at the French court she could sing, dance and even play the lute. She was at least 10 years younger than Catherine and Henry was convinced that she would be able to provide him with an heir.

This book is as close as we can get to Anne, it's her beautiful illustrated Book of Hours – a prayer book she would have treasured. And she's even signed it: 'Anne Boleyn'.

In another of Anne's prayer books there is this flirtatious and secret message from Henry and he says here: "If you remember my love in your prayers as strongly as I adore you, then I'll hardly be forgotten for I am yours, Henry R forever."

And Anne replied writing here: "By daily proof you shall me find, to be to you both loving and kind." And crucially she has written this under a picture of The Annunciation where the Angel Gabriel is telling Mary that she's going to have a son.

Filmed at Hever Castle, Kent