

Thomas Boleyn, 1st Earl of Wiltshire

Thomas Boleyn, 1st Earl of Wiltshire, 1st Earl of Ormond,^[2] **1st Viscount Rochford** KG^[3] KB (c. 1477 – 12 March 1539) was an English diplomat and politician in the Tudor era. He was born at the family home, Hever Castle, Kent, which had been purchased by his grandfather Sir Geoffrey Boleyn, who was a wealthy mercer. He was buried at St. Peter's parish church in the village of Hever. His parents were Sir William Boleyn (1451 – 10 October 1505) and Lady Margaret Butler (1454–1539), daughter and co-heiress of Thomas Butler, 7th Earl of Ormond. He was the father of Anne Boleyn, the second wife of King Henry VIII, and through her the maternal grandfather of Queen Elizabeth I of England.

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Marriage and issue

Sometime before 1499, Boleyn married Lady Elizabeth Howard, eldest daughter of Thomas Howard, 2nd Duke of Norfolk and Elizabeth Tilney. Five children are attested, only three of whom survived childhood.^[4]

- Mary Boleyn (c. 1499 – 19 July 1543); Mary Carey (1520–1528); Mary Stafford (1534–1543); Mary's second husband, William Stafford, was knighted in 1545 – two years after his wife's death in 1543.
- Thomas Boleyn the younger (c. 1500 –) (thought to have died young) ^[4]

The Right Honourable The Earl of Wiltshire and Ormond KG KB

Lord Privy Seal

In office 1530–1536

Monarch	Henry VIII
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Preceded by	Cuthbert Tunstall
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Succeeded by	Sir Thomas Cromwell
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Treasurer of the Household

In office 1521–1525

Monarch	Henry VIII
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Preceded by	Sir Edward Poynings
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Succeeded by	Sir William FitzWilliam
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Personal details

Born	Thomas Boleyn ca. 1477 Hever Castle Hever, Kent Kingdom of England
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- Anne Boleyn (c. 1501/1507 – 19 May 1536); later Marquess of Pembroke (1532–1536); later Queen Consort of England (1533–1536)
- Henry Boleyn (c. 1502/03 –) (thought to have died young)
- George Boleyn (c. 1504 – 17 May 1536); later 2nd Viscount Rochford (1529–1536) by courtesy

Diplomatic career

In 1503, he helped escort Margaret Tudor north for her marriage to James IV of Scotland.^[5] He was created a Knight of the Bath at Henry VIII's coronation in 1509.^[6]

His appointment as ambassador to the Low Countries brought him into contact with the regent Archduchess Margaret of Austria. Like Thomas, she spoke French and Latin and they got along well enough for her to accept his daughter Anne as a maid of honour.^[7]

Through his ability and the connections of his extended family, he became one of the king's leading diplomats. Known appointments and missions included:

- 1511 and 1517: Sheriff of Kent
- 1512: One of a party of three envoys to the Netherlands.
- 1518–1521 : ambassador to France, where he was involved in arrangements for the "Field of Cloth of Gold" meeting between Henry and the new French King Francis I in 1520.
- 1521 and 1523 : Envoy to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.
- 1527: One of a large envoy to France
- 1529: Envoy to a meeting of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and Pope Clement VII, to seek support for the marriage annulment of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. This was followed by another envoy to France.

Titles garnered

Boleyn was invested as a Knight of the Garter (KG) in 1523.^{[8][9]}

Boleyn's claim to his other titles derived from his mother, Lady Margaret Butler who was the younger daughter and co-heir of Thomas Butler, 7th Earl of Ormond.^[10] Thomas Butler, as an Irish peer, should only have sat in the Parliament of Ireland. However, as a personal friend of Henry VII he was summoned to the English parliament in November 1488 as "Thomas Ormond de Rochford, *chevaler*". At this time, he was already 8th Earl of Carrick and 7th Earl of Ormond.^[11]

In English law, matrilineal descent is not considered valid for earldoms, and in Brehon law, then largely still in use in Ireland, new leaders were chosen by election. These customs were, in Boleyn's case, outweighed by a more important consideration – he was the father of two pretty daughters. Henry VIII dallied first with Boleyn's elder daughter Mary, then with his younger daughter, Anne. Boleyn's ambition was so considerable that unsubstantiated rumours had it that he allowed his wife to have an affair with the king, but those rumours were intended to steer the king away from marrying Anne, and even suggested that she was his own daughter.^[12] When it was claimed that Henry had had an affair with both Anne's sister and mother, the king replied to the rumours, "Never with the mother."^[13]

Died	12 March 1539 (aged 61–62)
Resting place	St. Peter's Church Hever, Kent United Kingdom 51°11′02″N 0°06′41″E﻿ / ﻿51.18417°N 0.11139°E﻿ / 51.18417; 0.11139
Nationality	English
Spouse(s)	Lady Elizabeth Howard
Children	Mary Boleyn ^[1] Anne, Queen of England George Boleyn, Viscount Rochford
Mother	Lady Margaret Butler
Father	Sir William Boleyn
Residence	Hever Castle
Occupation	Diplomat, Politician

In 1525, Henry VIII became enamoured of Anne and began pursuing her. Her father was elevated to the peerage as Viscount Rochford on 18 June 1525.^[14] The title referred to the "barony" of Rochford supposedly created in 1488 for his grandfather. The title had fallen into abeyance as Ormond had died without any male heir in 1515.

As Henry's passion for Anne intensified, so did her father's titles. Henry pressured the main claimant to the earldom of Ormond, Piers Butler, to renounce all his claims to the titles in 1529. Piers Butler was rewarded by being created Earl of Ossory five days later.

Boleyn's claims to the Earldom of Wiltshire also depended upon his Irish relatives. This time, he had to go back to his maternal great-grandfather, James Butler, 5th Earl of Ormond, to establish a claim. While James Butler was indeed the 1st Earl of Wiltshire (of the third creation), on 1 May 1461 he lost his titles and his life when he was executed by the victorious Yorkists. The title was subsequently revived (in fourth and fifth creations) and bestowed on people unrelated to the Butlers of Ormond. This did not prevent the creation of the earldom for the 6th time. On 8 December 1529 Thomas Boleyn, Viscount Rochford, was created Earl of Wiltshire and Earl of Ormond.^[10]

Also on 8 December 1529, the Earl of Wiltshire's only surviving son, George, was granted the courtesy title of Viscount Rochford. His title of Viscount, although initially a courtesy title, ceased to be a mere courtesy title sometime before 13 July 1530.^{[10][15]} On 17 May 1536, Lord Rochford was executed for treason, and all his titles were forfeited.^{[10][16]} His widow, Jane, Viscountess Rochford, however, continued to use the title after her husband's death. Lady Rochford was herself attainted for treason and beheaded at Tower Green (not Tower Hill) within the Tower of London on 13 February 1542 with Henry VIII's fifth wife, Queen Katherine Howard.^{[16][17]}

Boleyn was appointed Lord Privy Seal in 1530. In 1532, his daughter Anne was granted a peerage, being created Marquess of Pembroke in her own right, before marrying Henry the following year and becoming queen consort. Boleyn acquiesced in Anne's judicial execution and that of her brother Lord Rochford when Henry discarded her in favour of his third wife, Queen Jane Seymour.

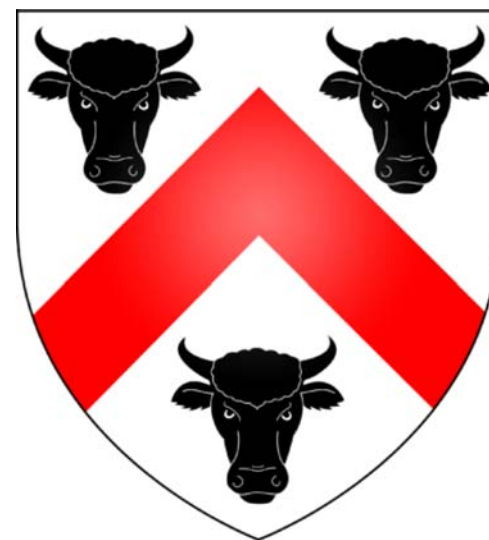
At this point Boleyn was replaced as Lord Privy Seal and left in disgrace until his death a few years later.^[18] He suffered a final indignity when the claims of Piers Butler to the Earldom of Ormond were recognised and he again became Earl of Ormond from 22 January 1538.^[18] There were two earls of Ormond in the Kingdom until his death on 12 March 1539.^[18]

In popular culture

Thomas Boleyn has been portrayed by Sir Michael Hordern in *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969), by Benjamin Whitrow in *Henry VIII*, and by Jack Shepherd and Mark Rylance in the 2003 and 2008 film versions of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, respectively. The 2007 Showtime series *The Tudors* has Nick Dunning in the role depicting him as ambitious, cunning and devious, constantly



Arms of Sir Thomas Boleyn, 1st Earl of Wiltshire and Ormond, KG



Arms of the Boleyn family of London, including Sirs Geoffrey, William and Thomas, Great Grandfather, Grandfather and Father of Anne Boleyn.

working to curry favour for his family against everyone else and always willing to "motivate" his daughter, Anne, lest Henry lose interest in her. David Robb played Boleyn as a constantly furious, irascible schemer in *Wolf Hall*.

Styles and honours

- *Sir* Thomas Boleyn KG KB (1523–1525)
- *The Rt. Hon.* The Viscount Rochford KG KB (1525–1527)
- *The Rt. Hon.* The Earl of Wiltshire and of Ormond KG KB (8 December 1529^[18]–1539)

Note: on 22 February 1538, the earldom of Ormond was restored to Piers Butler, 8th Earl of Ormond.

Family tree

See also

- Palace of Beaulieu
- List of ambassadors from the Kingdom of England to France

Footnotes

1. Weir, Alison (2012-09-20). *Mary Boleyn: 'The Great and Infamous Whore'*. Vintage. p. 226. ISBN 9780099546481. "*Letters Patent by Henry VIII*, referenced in Alison Weir's 2011 book, *Mary Boleyn: "The Great and Infamous Whore"*, reveal that Mary had been posthumously accorded the title Dame Mary Stafford. Her husband, William, had been knighted on 23 September 1545, with Mary having died in 1543, two years earlier. These letters indicate that, in their final years, the couple had remained outcasts from the court and in 1542 were dealing with family real estate concerns, living in retirement at Rochford Hall in Essex, which was owned by the Boleyns."
2. On 22 February 1538, the earldom of Ormond was restored to Piers Butler, 8th Earl of Ormond
3. Richardson 2004, p. 180.
4. Ridgway 2012, pp. 189–195
5. Ives 2005
6. Wilkinson 2009, p. 67
7. Wilkinson 2009, pp. 20–22
8. Shaw 1906, p. 21
9. List of the Knights of the Garter (1348–present) (<http://www.heraldica.org/topics/orders/garterlist.htm>)
10. Cokayne 1949, p. 51
11. Chrimes 1999, p. 138

12. [Weir 2012](#), pp. 42–44
13. [Weir 2012](#), p. 145
14. [Cokayne 1949](#), p. 739
15. [Cherry 2011](#), p. 53
16. [Cokayne 1945](#), pp. 141–142
17. [Davies 2004](#)
18. [Hughes 2004](#)
19. Elizabeth Norton, 2013. [The Boleyn Women](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=A1OoAwAAQBAJ) (<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=A1OoAwAAQBAJ>), Amberley Publishing
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External links

- **Boleyn Family** (<http://www.tudorplace.com.ar/BOLEYN.htm>) A pedigree of the Boleyn family
- **Sir Thomas Boleyn** (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=12262&Plpi=21206056>) Find A Grave

Political offices		
Preceded by <u>Sir Edward Poynings</u>	<u>Treasurer of the Household</u> 1521–1525	Succeeded by <u>Sir William FitzWilliam</u>
Preceded by <u>Cuthbert Tunstall</u> (Bishop of London)	<u>Lord Privy Seal</u> 1530–1536	Succeeded by <u>Sir Thomas Cromwell</u>
Peerage of England		
New title	<u>Viscount Rochford</u> <i>1st creation</i> 1525–1533	Succeeded by <u>George Boleyn</u>
Preceded by <u>George Boleyn</u>	<u>Viscount Rochford</u> <i>1st creation</i> 1536–1539	Extinct
New creation	<u>Earl of Wiltshire</u> <i>6th creation</i> 1529–1539	Extinct
Peerage of Ireland		
New creation	<u>Earl of Ormond</u> <i>2nd creation</i> 1529–1539	Extinct

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