



## Anne, Queen of England (1665-1714)

by Geoffrey W. Bateman

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A tinted engraving (ca 1706-1710) of Queen Anne.

The last of the Stuart monarchs, Anne Stuart was queen of England from 1702 to 1714. Historians of sexuality consider her long intimate friendship with Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, central to the period's acceptance and valorization of romantic, and even erotic, relationships between upper-class women.

Anne Stuart was born on February 6, 1665. She was the daughter of Anne Hyde and James, Duke of York, later James II, who served a brief tenure as king after his brother Charles II died. Anne's older sister, Mary, held the throne with her husband William of Orange after the so-called Glorious Revolution in 1688, which exiled James II over fears that he would return England to Catholicism.

Anne spent her infancy and early childhood in England and France, but in 1670 she returned permanently to England. When she was six, her mother died of cancer, at which time she and her sister moved to Richmond palace, joining the household of Edward Villiers, his wife Lady Frances, and their seven children to be raised in proper Protestant fashion.

It was here that Anne met Sarah Jennings (1660-1744), who would remain her closest friend, confidante, and advisor for the next twenty-five years. During her adolescence and young adulthood, she also corresponded passionately with Frances Apsley. This passionate correspondence was Anne's first love affair, albeit only an epistolary one.

Anne did not particularly enjoy the company of the Villiers girls, a situation which may have contributed to her growing fondness for Sarah. Their close friendship continued throughout their childhood. Emma Donoghue observes that through her unselfish devotion to Anne and her candid demeanor, Sarah earned herself the central place in Anne's heart.

Anne's relationship with Sarah continued into adulthood, surviving many transitions, including Sarah's marriage to John Churchill, the criticism of her sister Mary, and Anne's own marriage and rise to the throne.

On July 28, 1683, Anne married George, Electoral Prince of Hanover, and assumed her new title of Princess of Denmark. Her marriage initiated a large number of unsuccessful pregnancies. She had countless miscarriages and gave birth to about twenty children. All but one, William, Duke of Gloucester, died shortly after birth. Tragically, William died at the age of eleven, depriving the Stuart line of an heir.

To the chagrin of the royal family and Queen Mary in particular, Anne's attachment to Sarah persisted and began to attract negative attention. As Kendall notes, the critics considered it an "immoderate passion," inappropriate for a princess. Mary repeatedly called for Anne to dismiss Sarah from her company and forgo their friendship.

Despite such pressure, Anne remained loyal to Sarah. When Anne became queen after William's death, she promoted Sarah to the position of first lady of the bedchamber, which gave her unrestricted access to the

queen. Anne also bestowed many gifts on Sarah and her husband, the first Duke of Marlborough, including the extravagantly expensive Blenheim Palace.

Reading Anne and Sarah's relationship in the context of women's writing at the times, Kendall argues that such intimate relationships between upper and upper-middle class women were commonplace and appeared frequently in plays written by women during Anne's reign, many of which were dedicated to the queen.

Emerging from the early feminist writing of figures such as Mary Astell (1666-1731) and Judith Drake (n.d.), female playwrights such as Catharine Trotter (1679-1749) featured representations of lesbian love in their plays. In fact, Trotter is credited as the author of the first lesbian play in English, *Agnes de Castro* (1695), which she dedicated to her intimate friend, Lady Sarah Piers.

Sarah and Anne's intimacy began to wane after the first few years of Anne's rule. As Anne slowly began to pay more attention to her Tory advisors, Sarah felt her political opinions neglected.

To make matters worse, Anne grew fond of Abigail Hill Masham (d. 1734), a younger relative of Sarah's whom she had placed at court. As Abigail increasingly played the role of Anne's confidante, this emotional betrayal was too much for Sarah to bear. She later became one of Anne's most bitter critics, attacking her for "having noe [sic] inclination for any but her own sex."

In addition to suffering through many difficult pregnancies, miscarriages, and childbirths, Anne struggled with many other illnesses. At the end of July 1714, she suffered a fit and fell into a coma. She died on August 1, 1714.

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**Geoffrey W. Bateman** is the Assistant Director for the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military, a research center based at the University of California, Santa Barbara, that promotes the study of gays and lesbians in the military. He is co-editor of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Debating the Gay Ban in the Military*, as well as author of a study on gay personnel and multinational units. He earned his M.A. in English literature at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in eighteenth-century British literature and theories of genders and sexuality, but now lives in Denver, Colorado, where he is co-parenting two sons with his partner and a lesbian couple.