



# Learning and Court Culture: Women in the Court of Henry VIII

## Citation

Meadows, Jessica Nicole. 2021. Learning and Court Culture: Women in the Court of Henry VIII. Master's thesis, Harvard University Division of Continuing Education.

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Learning and Court Culture: Women in the Court of Henry VIII

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A Thesis in the Field of History  
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

November 2021



## Abstract

This work details the lives and roles of the wives of Henry VIII as well as other female members of the British aristocracy, specifically during the reign of Henry VIII and the time immediately preceding and succeeding his reign. The research cited in this work show that female members of the nobility, particularly the wives of Henry VIII, were not completely independent of Henry VIII but gained independence through their own unique households and through the decisions they made in this space they could attain a certain level of autonomy. Women's leadership within the household could translate into leadership outside of the household and allowed women to operate and hold power independently of their male counterparts, particularly when employing religious and patronage efforts. In looking how female members of the nobility during this era were raised and educated and how that translates into their roles as wife and mother, one can see that the women of this time employed the education that was provided to them inside and outside the home. Additionally, women of this time utilized kinship structures and familial alliances, in addition to wardship systems and the orchestration of marriages to benefit themselves and their families. In an era of the divine right of Kings, when the monarch held almost absolute power, many of the wives of Henry VIII managed to acquire and, at least temporarily, hold on to some level of independent power and autonomy and used it to influence or direct change domestically and abroad.

## Dedication

Dedicated to the three strongest women I've ever met, my sister, Sara Anne Meadows, my mother, Sabine Martina Meadows and my Oma, Helga Erika Snyder.

To my sister - the moment I held you in my arms for the first time was, and remains, the happiest moment of my life. From the day you were born you brightened my life and the lives of everyone around you, hence the nickname Sara Sunshine. It is your unconditional love and belief in me that has inspired me to embark on such an undertaking. You are, without a doubt, the best thing that has ever happened to me. Thank you so much for being my sister and my best friend. Thank you for inspiring me to be my best every single day. You have no idea how much I love you and appreciate you.

To my mom - thank you. Thank you for raising me, single handedly. Thank you for giving me a love of reading and encouraging me to read anything I want. Thank you for encouraging my love of education and for allowing me to teach you things as I go. Thank you for being my cheerleader and for believing in me when I forget to believe in myself. Thank you for telling me if I can dream it, I can do it. Thank you for reminding me to take life one bite at a time. Thank you for being the fearless, brilliant, brave, hysterically funny woman you are. I am so proud of you, and I am so proud to be your daughter. Everything I am, I am because of you. I appreciate you more than you will ever know. I love you so much, Gigi.

To my Oma - this work itself is for you and, in a sense, inspired by you. The

countless sacrifices that you have made in your life are incredibly appreciated.

Throughout your life you have always put your children and grandchildren first without asking anything in return. This is a relatively small thing, but it is for you, and I could not have written it without being inspired by you. The strength and tenacity you showed by immigrating with your children has led me to a lifetime of looking to strong women, like yourself. Thank you for being such a strong, independent woman and raising a strong, independent woman. Thank you for being my Omalee. Ich liebe dich.

In loving memory of my Mawmaw, Mary Catherine Sovine.

In loving memory of Jim Schad.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Anja-Silvia Goeing for serving as my thesis advisor and for sticking with me through this process. I am so incredibly thankful for you.

I would like to acknowledge William Palmer for inspiring my love of Henry VIII.

I would like to acknowledge all of my friends and family for supporting me during this process, particularly: Elizabeth Walters, the lights of my life Caitlin Grimes and Brittany Hunter, and Sheila Schad.

I would like to acknowledge Pepe Norman Meadows and Noel Haven Meadows. I love you both more than I can express, and I am so grateful to be your mother.

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## Definition of Terms and Usage of Names

Wife - one who is legally married to a man.

Husband - one who is legally married to a woman.

Mother - a woman who has given birth.

Father - the biological or presumed father of a child.

Daughter - a child born in the female sex.

Son - a child born in the male sex.

Childhood - the period in which one receives care, typically to age 14.

## Names, Birth Dates, and Death Dates of Henry and his Spouses

Henry VIII: 1491-1547, reigned from 1509 to 1547<sup>1</sup>

Catherine of Aragon (also: Catalina de Aragón): 1485-1536, married to Henry from 1509 to 1533.<sup>2</sup>

Anne Boleyn: c1500-1536, married to Henry from 1533 to 1536<sup>3</sup>

Jane Seymour: 1508/9-1537, married to Henry from 1536 to 1537<sup>4</sup>

Anne of Cleves: 1515-1557, married to Henry in 1540<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of his life and recent literature see E. W. Ives, "Henry VIII (1491–1547), king of England and Ireland," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12955>.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of his life and recent literature see C. S. L. Davies and John Edwards, "Katherine [Catalina, Catherine, Katherine of Aragon] (1485–1536), queen of England, first consort of Henry VIII," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4891>.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of her life and recent literature see E. W. Ives, "Anne [Anne Boleyn] (c. 1500–1536), queen of England, second consort of Henry VIII," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-557>.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of her life and recent literature see Barrett L. Beer, "Jane [née Jane Seymour] (1508/9–1537), queen of England, third consort of Henry VIII," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-14647>.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of her life and recent literature see Retha M. Warnicke, "Anne [Anne of Cleves] (1515–1557), queen of England, fourth consort of Henry VIII," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-558>.

Catherine Howard: 1518x1524-1542, married to Henry from 1540 to 1542<sup>6</sup>

Catherine Parr: 1512-1548, married to Henry from 1543 to 1547<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of her life and recent literature see Retha M. Warnicke, "Katherine [Catherine] [née Katherine Howard] (1518x24–1542), queen of England and Ireland, fifth consort of Henry VIII," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4892>.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of her life and recent literature see James, Susan E. "Katherine [Kateryn, Catherine] [née Katherine Parr] (1512–1548), queen of England and Ireland, sixth consort of Henry VIII," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4893>.

## Chapter I.

### Introduction

The reign of Henry VIII was a unique time in English history marked by religious reformation, social and political unrest and perhaps most notoriously, Henry's marriage to his six wives. The women of the court of Henry VIII held varying levels of power and autonomy and were more educated than their earlier counterparts overall. This thesis asks the question of what was the extent and nature of the powers that these different royal women exercised. How much autonomy and agency did they have, and to what extent was it shaped by their education?

Henry VIII grew up as the second son of Henry VII, the first Tudor king and Elizabeth of York, whose union ended the War of the Roses. Henry's relationship with his parents, grandparents and siblings undoubtedly shaped how he viewed relationships in his personal life and his political views. His mother, Elizabeth of York, was a markedly unpolitical figure choosing to devote her time to child rearing.<sup>8</sup> After a tumultuous political upbringing, Henry's father, Henry VII fought for the English throne with the assistance of his mother Margaret Beaufort who held a remarkable level of control for the era.<sup>9</sup> Margaret Beaufort largely shaped the upbringing of Henry's older brother, Arthur,

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<sup>8</sup> Nicola Tallis, *Uncrowned Queen: The Life of Margaret Beaufort, Mother of the Tudors* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2500613&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>9</sup> Tallis, *Uncrowned Queen*.

and was a steady influence in Henry's life until her death on June 29, 1509 just days after Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon.<sup>10</sup> Margaret's emphasis on education, as demonstrated by her founding of Christ's College, Cambridge in 1505 potentially influenced Henry's views on female education and independence.<sup>11</sup>

In this thesis I am arguing that female members of the nobility during the reign on Henry VIII held social power differently from each other due to their relationship with Henry, their acceptance by the people, and their education, skills and expertise. In order to circumscribe my use of "social power" in this work, I am working with a classification of power that John R. French Jr. and Bertram Raven introduced in 1959 and that is today referred to as the standard theory of social power.<sup>12</sup> For this research, their basic categories of power relations—legitimate power, charisma, expertise or special skills, means and position to reward or bribe, coercive power-- are important to discuss the relation between Henry, the queens, and the British people. While there was legitimate power attached to the role of queen, the often-tumultuous relationship between the queen and Henry VIII had a great influence on the range of decisions that the queen was able to make within the court and in her dealings with the people. The queen's interest in religion, education and scholarship shaped the direction by which she would be active as a patron and educator herself at court, but the relationship with Henry was key to the

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<sup>10</sup> Tallis, *Uncrowned Queen*.

<sup>11</sup> Tallis, *Uncrowned Queen*.

<sup>12</sup> John R. P. French Jr., et al, *The Bases of Social Power* (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 152.

queens' ability to realize what she was aiming towards. One of the comparative results of this study is that although Henry lessened the power of autonomous decision with each queen, from Catherine of Aragon (with the most independent power of all) to Catherine Parr, every queen had a unique profile of social power, depending on factors such as their education and their standing at court.

The chapters follow the life cycle of the queens, starting with the gendered upbringing of the daughters, their education and marriage and ending with the life of the wife and her duties. These were chiefly in her role as a mother towards the next generations of royals. But queenly power also very much relied on the educated expertise and literary interests of the queens, as patrons of the church, the arts and scholarship, what French and Raven summaries as "expert power" that does not have its origin in legitimacy and contracts, but in education. With their reigning practice, the queens set the tone for the next to come, Elizabeth I, who inherited both, the legitimate power of the king and the education and cultural activity of the queens.

The idea of this thesis to connect education and later social power of the queens is new. Much more has been written about education and social mobility in the Renaissance. Such research has explained how Thomas Cromwell, a blacksmith's son could become Henry's chancellor, because he knew to keep track of accounting details and daily organizing and administration procedures of the government.<sup>13</sup> Cromwell was a product of his (self-)education not of his environment. G. W. Bernard alludes to Henry utilizing his education and the education of many of his advisors and members of the

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<sup>13</sup> For more information on Cromwell and a recent bibliography see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell, A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Viking, 2018).

clergy, several of whom came from humble origins, to make his decisions, thus giving his advisors a share in his legitimate royal governance power.<sup>14</sup> The authors agree that education had a role to play in upward social mobility during the Tudor-Era.

But the phenomenon of social mobility through education has been studied chiefly for male members of society, not least because data about their education and positions are more easily available and survives in greater quantity than for their female counterparts.<sup>15</sup> Usually, upward social mobility in females has been seen as part of schemes to “marry well.” All of Henry’s wives had “married well” according to this notion (not, of course in terms of their health and well-being), and their humanist education was part of the package of court culture they brought with them to the royal household.

The book *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*, by the noted historian, David Starkey, focuses on Henry VIII’s desire to have a legitimate heir.<sup>16</sup> Starkey theorized that Henry’s conduct towards his six wives were a direct result of his aim to produce a legitimate male heir.<sup>17</sup> Henry’s goal was to be successful, popular, and he truly wanted to do the right thing by Catherine of Aragon whom he was married to for almost a quarter of

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<sup>14</sup> G. W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 72.

<sup>15</sup> James Raymond, “Henry VIII’s Military Revolution: The Armies of the Sixteenth Century-Britain and Europe,” *International Library of Historical Studies*, no. 43 (2007): 27.

<sup>16</sup> David, Starkey, *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2003), 23.

<sup>17</sup> Starkey, *Six Wives*, 23.



a century. Henry wanted and needed a son. Catherine of Aragon only had one daughter, which is what likely led him to Anne Boleyn in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

The historian Maria Dowling, who focused on the reign of Henry VIII, began an interesting dialogue regarding the culture of learning and education in the Tudor court in her article, “A Woman’s Place? Learning and the Wives of Henry VIII.”<sup>19</sup> In this article the role of Catherine of Aragon, a humanist, Anne Boleyn, a reformist, and Catherine Parr, an author and scholar in her own right, were discussed. Dowling examines the educational origins of these three patronesses of education as well as their personal endowments to the arts and their scholarly contributions to society. The lack of interest in education that the other half of Henry’s wives showed was remarked upon by Dowling, that is to say the unremarkable scholarship of Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and Catherine Howard was notable only in the sense it was not of note. This article highlights the importance of Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Catherine Parr independently and in the wider context of their European influence in regard to education and theology.

Historian Alice Friedman discusses the role of education in her work, *The Influence of Humanism on the Education of Girls and Boys in Tudor England*.<sup>20</sup> In her article she discusses the role of educational theorists and their views regarding female education, including Juan Luis Vives’ views on the education of the future Queen Mary by her mother Catherine of Aragon. Vives’ view was that women were not made to be

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<sup>18</sup> Starkey, *Six Wives*, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Maria Dowling, “A Woman’s Place? Learning and the Wives of Henry VIII,” *History Today* 41 (1991): 38.

<sup>20</sup> Alice T Friedman, “The Influence of Humanism on the Education of Girls and Boys in Tudor England,” *History of Education Quarterly* 25, no. 1/2 (1985): 57-70.

educated in a classical sense and when educating them one should include traditional feminine arts including cooking and needlework. The article continued to say that it was primarily women of upper class that received any training in Latin or humanist rhetoric whereas both girls and boys that attended a church school or home education program were generally taught the foundations of literature, including ABC's, as well as biblical lessons and basic prayers. Men continuing to grammar school were required to learn Latin, a prerequisite to admission. Although education was unequal between men and women the education of women is still not non-existent.

Most authors agreed that education had a role to play in the queens' behaviour at court during the Tudor-Era. I am building upon their work by asking what their education gave them to make their own decisions, and where it was used. My answer to that is the desperation Henry VIII felt to have a legitimate son and heir led to unstable political conditions that enabled female courtiers, some of them for their education, that is the acquisition of certain qualities, others for different reasons to rise because of merit taken in a broad sense of the word, not blood. Education made different women attractive to him, and they could use these qualities to gain royal attention.

## Chapter II.

### Growing up Gendered: Daughter

All of Henry's spouses were born into a courtly household; and with one exception, Catherine Howard. The idea of a period in the life cycle designated as 'childhood' became more defined in the sixteenth century with children being described as distinctly different from their adult counterparts in literature.<sup>21</sup> In regards to the nobility, the period of childhood continued until the age of fourteen, though there were separate stages of childhood within the overarching period.<sup>22</sup> These periods were described as "'the sucking child', 'the child that can both run and go', the stage of talking, and the child who was potentially useful.'"<sup>23</sup> Both male and female children remained together in the nursery, typically until the age of seven when male children would leave the nursery and their female counterparts.<sup>24</sup> Daughters remained under their mothers supervision and had little contact with male children.<sup>25</sup>

The English Reformation, possibly inadvertently, set the groundwork for gender equality with "single baptismal ceremony for all infants, using the same prayer for girls

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<sup>21</sup> Boyd M. Berry, "The First English Pediatricians and Tudor Attitudes Toward Childhood," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35, no. 4 (1974): 563, doi:10.2307/2709086.

<sup>22</sup> Sara Heller Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 7.

as for boys and thus affirming its doctrine that souls had no sex.”<sup>26</sup> Religious beliefs aside, the ideal outcome of a marital union was the production of a male heir to inherit. Disappointment could be found at the birth of a daughter, although a healthy, live birth was seen as a positive sign that more healthy children could be born.<sup>27</sup>

#### Nursery: Location and Proximity to Parents

Aristocratic mothers often held a supervisory role in lieu of handling their childrens minute by minute activities. An array of nurses and maidservants took care of the childrens everyday needs, often under close supervision of the mothers.<sup>28</sup> The prevailing belief was that “affection between nurse and child, child and parents, ought to be moderate” as overly affectionate parenting was harmful to the child.<sup>29</sup> The idea of showing children excessive affection was seen in such a negative light that John Jones writes in *The Arte and Science of preseruing Bodie and Soule in all healthe, wisdome, and Catholike Religion* that “parents who coddle their children...become metaphorically murderers, ‘strangling’ their children.”<sup>30</sup>

Breastfeeding was not common practice for the aristocracy, instead a wetnurse was selected. It was believed that the wetnurse set the tone for their charges feelings towards their parents and as such they should be “courteous, loving and kind to her

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<sup>26</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Berry, “English Pediatricians,” 568.

<sup>30</sup> Berry, “English Pediatricians,” 571.

suckling”.<sup>31</sup> Literature of the day indicated that there was a connection between the wetnurse and child in regard to more than their parental sentiments, stating that when looking for a wetnurse one must be, “not of yll complexion and of worse maners: but such as shal be sobre, honeste and chaste, well fourmed, amyable and chearefull, so that she may accustome the infant vnto myrth, no dronkard, vyeyous nor sluttysse, for suche corruptethe the nature of the chylde.”<sup>32</sup>

As the idea was that children could ‘suck up’ whatever ills the wetnurse had, in terms of health or morality, some mothers did choose to breastfeed their children. Literature of the age showed maternal breastfeeding in a more favorable light with John Jone’s writing, “Wherfore as it is agreing to nature, so is it also necessarye & comly for the own mother to nource the own child. Whiche yf it maye be done, it shal be most cōmendable and holsome, yf not ye must be well aduised in taking of •nource,”<sup>33</sup>

### Orphans’ Wardships

In some cases, young noblemen and women were placed under the care of relatives or family relations, either due to the loss of one or both parents, by royal decree, or to aid in their education and upbringing. Catherine Howard, the fifth wife of Henry VIII, was placed in such a wardship after the death of her mother where she “had been brought up by her step-grandmother, the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, at whose establishment in Horsham, Sussex, sundry Howard relations and dependents were

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<sup>31</sup> Berry, “English Pediatricians,” 568.

<sup>32</sup> Berry, “English Pediatricians,” 568.

<sup>33</sup> Berry, “English Pediatricians,” 568.

deposited during their childhood.”<sup>34</sup> Catherine’s time at her step-grandmothers would lead to her eventual downfall as she had been sexually active with one or more gentlemen. Catherine and the other young noblewomen she lived with in a girls’ dormitory were known to have dalliances with the young gentlemen of the household, at times sneaking them into their dormitory. Catherine likely engaged in some relations with “Henry Manox, a musician in the service of her grandmother” before beginning “an affair with Francis Dereham, a sophisticated young buck who was want to sport with her 'both in his doublet and hose between the sheets and in naked bed'.”<sup>35</sup> While many aristocratic women engaged in sexual affairs prior to marriage, the secondary literature suggests clearly that Catherine’s upbringing as an orphan had to do with her later sexual behavior at court.

### Education

While all of Henry’s spouses grew up in a courtly household, only one of them was actually educated to be queen; Catherine of Aragon. Catherine of Aragon’s humanist education was important for her social power that had its origins not only in her splendor and charisma, but in her knowledge and skills that she used to introduce innovations at court, from bathrooms for corporal hygiene to Latin reading, impressing high ranking

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<sup>34</sup> Anne Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting: From the Tudors to the Present Day* (New York: Knopf : Distributed by Random House, 1984), 38.

<sup>35</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 38.

foreign ambassadors and courtly dignitary, and spreading the glory of the English throne throughout Europe.<sup>36</sup>

The education of sons and daughters was inherently separate and unequal in the content and breadth of the education acquired. Aristocratic males generally left the nursery around seven however many of their female counterparts were educated alongside them or were provided with tutors of their own.<sup>37</sup> Before this age both genders were taught reading beginning around age three or four, typically by their mothers or a governess, by learning the alphabet in order to read the bible and to engage in domestic tasks.<sup>38</sup> Daughters and sons also “embroidered samplers that were viewed as demonstrations of literacy and piety, compliance and organizational skill.”<sup>39</sup> Young women’s embroidery skills were more detailed than their male counterparts, typically beginning around age five with lettering and progressing to a “a coloured band sampler” before age ten, and a whitework sampler.<sup>40</sup>

The sixteenth century saw the introduction of a more clearly defined period of childhood which might include an education influenced by Humanism. This school of

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<sup>36</sup> Catherine of Aragon, further literature in C. S. L. Davies and John Edwards, "Katherine [Catalina, Catherine, Katherine of Aragon] (1485–1536), queen of England, first consort of Henry VIII." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep. 2004, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4891>.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," *Critical Survey* 22, no. 1 (2010): 2.

<sup>38</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 10-11.

<sup>39</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 11.

<sup>40</sup> See examples in Betty Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers and Pictorial Needlework 1650–1850* (New York: Knopf, 1993), xvii. Lanto Synge calls the sampler “a kind of notebook which was always at hand,” in *Art of Embroidery: History of Style and Technique* (London: Antique Collectors Club, Ltd. 2005), 82.

thought allowed for new educational approaches for children which “sought to lure the child to learning through pleasure and sometimes (as in the extravagant case of Ascham) through games.”<sup>41</sup> The materials children were taught, and their approach changed during this period and the idea of educating the “intellectually childish” was formed and included simplistic and shorter catechisms.<sup>42</sup>

An integral part of raising noble children lay in their education. The court of Henry VIII saw well educated young women who were able to best serve their families and the court in general and that education started in the nursery. Henry’s younger sister, the daughter of Henry VII, Mary Tudor was educated at the cost of “66s. 8d a quarter”, a notable expense for educating a woman. The emphasis placed on her education during her tenure as Queen of France as the wife of Louis XII would later benefit Anne Boleyn and other members of her court.<sup>43</sup> Mary’s “education began when she was four years old, with the appointment among her household of a schoolmaster... She was carefully instructed in French and Latin and in the courtly accomplishments, music, dancing, and embroidery.”<sup>44</sup>

That said, her education was less scholarly than subsequent courtly women. In France Mary’s English companions were quickly sent back to their home country and she was left with those that “never had experiens nor knowlech how to advertyse or gyfe me

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<sup>41</sup> Berry, “English Pediatricians,” 564.

<sup>42</sup> Berry, “English Pediatricians,” 563.

<sup>43</sup> Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School; a Study of Women's Education through Twelve Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 171.

<sup>44</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 171.



counsell yn any tyme of nede”, including the seven-year-old Anne Boleyn.<sup>45</sup> Henry grew up with siblings that were all well-educated, for the era, and in the process, possibly gained an inadvertent preference for partners that were learned in languages. His wives Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Catherine Howard, and Catherine Parr all spoke French, among other languages. This courtly need to speak different languages began in childhood and to lack it was detrimental. Nicholas Watton wrote a warning about Anne of Cleves when discussing her marriageability and emphasized her lack of education saying, “Frenche, Latyn or other langaige, she hath none, nor yet she canne not synge nor pleye enye instrument, for they take it heere in Germanye for a rebuke and an occasion of lightnesse that great ladyes shuld be lernyd or have enye knowledge of musike.”<sup>46</sup>

Having a well-educated daughter was essential to ensure an advantageous match, and that education began in childhood. The education between sons and daughters was separate and unequal, but their educations were of equal importance. The subject matter varied by gender but was regarded as of equal importance.

The content of a young women’s education varied according to what her family valued, but the need for an ability to run a household was consistent and included having mathematic and written skills sufficient enough to produce and supervise household and financial accounts and records.<sup>47</sup> A young noble woman education typically began under the instruction of a governess who would teach deportment and needlework. Tutors

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<sup>45</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 171-2.

<sup>46</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 172.

<sup>47</sup> Mazzola, “Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom,” 12.

would be brought in to the home to teach the traditional courtly education for women of dancing, various musical abilities, and languages in addition to a more academic education consisting of at minimum reading and religion.<sup>48</sup> In some scenarios a variety of tutors teaching an array of subjects would be replaced by one schoolmaster that would cover all academic pursuits with outside assistance still needed for skillsets such as music and dancing.<sup>49</sup> These schoolmasters, or all-encompassing academic teachers, were often educated at the university level.<sup>50</sup>

These schoolmasters were largely influenced by the humanist movement in England and conversely influenced the humanist movement. As women became more well educated, they began to produce literature and to teach independently of their male counterparts leading to a populous not only more accepting of an educated female but also a society that necessitated an educated woman. Various noblewomen showed various levels of education, and the following case studies will showcase the different levels of education for English nobility.

The aftermath of the reformation allowed for increasingly educated female populous in an effort to “get rid of catholic doctrine.”

Jane Grey, the nine-day queen, had an exceptional education that rivaled if not surpassed the successive queens, Mary and Elizabeth I. Her intelligence and learning was remarked upon in detail with Gardiner writing,

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<sup>48</sup> Karen Cunningham, “‘She Learns as She Lies’: Work and the Exemplary Female in Early Modern Education,” *Exemplaria* 7, no. 1 (1995): 222.

<sup>49</sup> Mazzola, “Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom,” 10,

<sup>50</sup> Mazzola, “Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom,” 3-4.

In her home at Bradgate she studied under Harding and Aylmer, her father's chaplains, and in the words of a contemporary 'came to such a large proficiency that she spake the Latin and Greek tongues with as sweet a fluency as if they had been natural and native to her, [and was] exactly skilled in liberal sciences and perfectly well studied in both kinds of philosophy'.<sup>5</sup> Others remark on her knowledge of French and Italian, even of Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldee." Foxe thought her superior to Edward VI in 'noble studies', and her gentle gravity and extraordinary learning proved dangerously attractive to the young king and had their part in drawing envious eyes upon her and, at last, in bringing her to the scaffold.<sup>51</sup>

A court of intellectual young women was formed, called the court of the muses was formed from daughters of prominent Protestant men of the time in an effort to "get rid of catholic doctrine."<sup>52</sup> Some of the women in this court include the daughters of Thomas More, "Lady Jane Howard, the daughters of Lord Protector Somerset, Lady Jane Grey and her sisters, the daughters of the Earl of Arundel, and the daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke."<sup>53</sup> These young women linked similar political and philosophical views with friendship and had strong Reformist viewpoints they shared among themselves and those surrounding them, including the ladies of their household.<sup>54</sup>

### Serving Unmarried at Court

Securing your child's place in a household at court, foreign or domestic, was something many noble parents aspired to. Children were placed in the households of higher ranking members of the nobility for several reasons, such as to find a spouse, to

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<sup>51</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 176,

<sup>52</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 175-6.

<sup>53</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 175-6.

<sup>54</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 175-6.

gain a patron, and to grant them introductions to other members of the nobility as well as an introduction to court life. At times these placements were extended visits, in other children would enter into the service of the higher-ranking member of the nobility. Some nobles rarely, if ever, would grant access to their homes and private lives to those outside of their families while others, such as the Duchess of Norfolk, engaged in this practice frequently.<sup>55</sup> Additionally this practice was used to form and strengthen bonds between noble families, creating strong patronage networks and lasting connections.<sup>56</sup>

Thomas Boleyn, the father of Anne and Mary Boleyn, was one of those parents and placed his daughters “at the Flemish court of Margaret of Austria and then in the household of Queen Claude of France.”<sup>57</sup> This education and the experiences that the young women gained there would shape their personalities, preferences, styles and philosophical views, particularly their time in France. Upon Anne’s return from the French court in 1522 to serve Catherine of Aragon “a patriotic observer there paid her the ultimate compliment of remarking that he 'would never have taken her for an Englishwoman, but for a Frenchwoman born'.”<sup>58</sup>

Ladies of the court served at the pleasure and request of the queen, who “employed a number of unmarried ladies-in-waiting, known as the maids of honour.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 2 (1990): 263, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639457>.

<sup>56</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 262.

<sup>57</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 13.

These maids of honor were almost exclusively members of the nobility who began serving the Queen's household in their teens as a way to complete their courtly education and to find marriage prospects.<sup>60</sup>

Finding yourself in a position at court as an unmarried woman could be incredibly beneficial to yours and your family as you gained access to those with the most power in the kingdom. That access could lead to lucrative appointments in the royal service and financial gains, and as a result, families went to great lengths to gain their children positions at court. This access to powerful members of court could be abused however, as we see in the case of one noblewoman, "Anne Basset, a maid of honour to Anne of Cleves, was constantly pestered by her mother, Lady Lisle, to intercede with the King in the interests of her family and friends, errands which the diffident Anne found onerous in the extreme."<sup>61</sup>

Serving as a lady-in-waiting had financial benefits for one's family as you saved on daily expenses. Their financial and accommodation arrangements were as follows,

Permitted one servant and one spaniel each, every maid was entitled to a hearty daily breakfast of a chine of beef, two loaves and a gallon of ale, with similarly generous provision for the remaining meals of the day. Furthermore, the monetary value of the allowances of firewood and candles allotted to the maids was reckoned to be worth more than £24 per year, and in addition to such prerequisites the maids were paid annual salaries which rose from £5 to £10 during the reign. On this they were expected to furnish themselves with an adequate wardrobe, which was not always an easy task as requirements relating to court dress could be alarmingly exacting, but fortunately their stipends were occasionally supplemented with gifts from the Queen.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 13.

<sup>62</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 14.

These young women were needed to keep the Queen's household running smoothly, but their service to the Queen had beneficial ramifications for their families. Being in a position of power and in close proximity to the crown had the potential to lead to direct and indirect financial gains, as well as increasing members of a family's level of power. It was not uncommon for the King and all of Henry's Queens to give gifts of clothing, jewels, and income producing lands to members of their court that faithfully served them. While at court one was provided for directly, and if a married woman serving the Queens husband did not have an apartment or other housing at court, the couple was granted free accommodations and board at court.<sup>63</sup>

### Courting and Betrothal

Procreation during the reign of Henry VIII was a necessity to achieve dynastic goals and for upward social mobility and young women were taught from an early age that they were expected to make an advantageous match. Their childhood was spent preparing them for such a match during which time they learned how to become an essential and pleasant part of their families in anticipation of doing so in their future households.<sup>64</sup> Noble parents began scouting their childrens future matrimonial prospects at an early age and it was not unusual for a betrothal to occur before puberty, oftentimes marked by the onset of menstruation. The age of marriage varied although "legally, girls could consent to marriage at twelve, although, even at the gentry level, few did so."<sup>65</sup> That

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<sup>63</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 4.

said, the nobility married younger and after a shorter period of courtship than their non-noble counterparts and that courtship was significantly less private with significantly more familial involvement.<sup>66</sup> As one reached the upper echelons of society courtship became even more controlled as women were required to make the most advantageous match while protecting their image. Higher ranking noble women were seldom, if ever, left alone with their suitors.<sup>67</sup> Additionally women were oftentimes unable to decline to marry the suitor their family had selected to them.<sup>68</sup>

Mothers were well known to hold a key place in the courtship process, lending their experience and skill as mediators between their daughters and the male world. As the proverb put it, 'he that would the daughter win, must with the mother first begin'.<sup>69</sup>

The courtship process for the nobility could be an intricate game or it could be a brief period during which the two families finalized arrangements for the upcoming nuptials. Regardless, young women were expected to initially take an outwardly passive role in the process while judging their suitors carefully.<sup>70</sup> As the courtship process progressed, women often took part in what was called the 'art of scorning' in which they would "scorn, jeer, and generally discourage the advances of a suitor."<sup>71</sup> This process of using the perfect amount of scorn was necessary to weed out the less serious suitors while

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<sup>66</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 25-6.

<sup>67</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 38.

<sup>69</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 31.

<sup>71</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 32.

ensuring that serious suitors were persistent and had the ability to fight for what they wanted in life.<sup>72</sup>

As the courtship process progressed young couples would become betrothed, which was a legal and ceremonial process that included an exchange of vows made before witnesses marking the couple's intent to become married. This process was termed "spousals", called "hand-fasting" or "called to be made sure."<sup>73</sup>

Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII's courtship took place while he was still married to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Before beginning that relationship, Anne was linked to the married poet Sir Thomas Wyatt and later Sir Henry Percy, the future Earl of Northumberland who sought marriage. Unfortunately for Percy Cardinal Wolsey intervened, very likely on behalf of Henry VIII, and the relationship ended.<sup>74</sup> Henry and Anne's relationship was consumed with passion from beginning to end, which seems to have surprised their contemporaries as it was observed that "her face, figure and complexion to be only mediocre, though all agreed she had 'very fine black eyes.'" <sup>75</sup> The image of graceful refinement, what Anne had created in France served her well in England and led to her being seen as a luminary of the court and a fashionable figurehead influencing styles. For example, "the ladies of the court soon took to copying the hanging sleeves affected by her to conceal the incipient sixth finger on her left hand and the

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<sup>72</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 32.

<sup>73</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 33.

<sup>74</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 19.

<sup>75</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 20.



embroidered chokers which hid the large protruding mole on her neck.”<sup>76</sup> Their courtship centered on Anne’s refusal to become Henry’s mistress, instead demanding marriage which she was later granted.

Henry’s third wife, Jane Seymour, had served in Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn’s households before beginning her relationship with Henry VIII. Jane was different from Henry’s first two wives in appearance and demeanor, and she presented herself as the modest virgin which captivated the king. Jane is described as being “of middle height,' Chapuy’s reported dispassionately, 'and nobody thinks she has much beauty. Her complexion is so whitish that she may be called rather pale. She is a little over twenty-five.’”<sup>77</sup> When Henry sent Jane “a letter accompanied by a purse full of sovereigns she respectfully kissed the missive but declined the gift, imploring Henry to consider her reputation as 'a well-born damsel' and suggesting that he should wait until 'such a time as God would be pleased to send her an advantageous marriage.’”<sup>78</sup> Jane followed in Anne’s footsteps by refusing to become the king’s mistress, while infatuating him with her seeming purity and innocence. Jane did work to turn Henry against his wife, her mistress “by telling him, in the presence of witnesses upon whom she could rely to confirm her assertion, 'How much his subjects abominate the marriage contracted with the concubine and that no one considers it legitimate.’”<sup>79</sup> Henry, already sick of Anne, was infatuated with Jane and her combination of flirtation, teasing, and attacks upon

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<sup>76</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 20.

<sup>77</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 28.

<sup>78</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 28.

Anne were enough to be his wife's undoing and proved to serve Jane, as she and Henry were soon betrothed.

### Picking Spouse vs. Having Spouse Chosen

Henry VIII was in the unique position of being able to choose his own spouses for his own reasons. He chose Catherine of Aragon and Anne of Cleves for diplomatic reasons, and yet both marriages ironically ended in annulment. His other six wives were chosen for his personal enjoyment.

After his first marriage ended in divorce, second marriage ended in execution and third ended in the death of his wife in childbed Henry was pressed to take a fourth bride. His first three brides were chosen because of Henry's infatuation with them, but it was time that he selected a bride for England and as such Sir Thomas Cromwell, among others, began looking for viable options. Cromwell selected two princesses from Cleves, a Lutheran Duchy, and Henry selected Anne as a result of the favorable portrait of her painted by Hans Holbein. On October 6, 1539, Henry signed the nuptial contract which commenced marriage preparations and preparations for Anne's arrival in England. Before Anne arrived at her household was selected including her Privy Chamber, "with the Countess of Rutland and Ladies Rochford, Edgecumbe and Browne sharing the honors."<sup>80</sup>

Henry's sixth and final wife Catherine Parr was selected for companionship and for her calming presence, particularly following the scandal that Catherine Howard had caused. In her thirties and twice widowed Catherine did not have much of a choice in her

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<sup>80</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 35.

marriage to Henry, and in July of 1543 they were wed. Catherine was a Protestant reformist who enjoyed intellectual pursuits and studying theology among other academic pursuits with her ladies in waiting and spent time bantering about religion with the king.<sup>81</sup>

### Promiscuity

Mary, Anne Boleyn's older sister, seems to have distinguished herself primarily by a reputation for looseness, for an Italian observer later reminisced that the French King had regarded her as 'una grandissima ribald et infante sopra tutten' and her morals were indeed such that soon after her return to England and her marriage, in 1521, to William Carey, she became the mistress of Henry VIII. She was to profit very little from the attachment. Her cuckolded husband remained a comparatively lowly gentleman of the Privy Chamber, not even being knighted in return for his complaisance, and Mary herself was swiftly abandoned by the King. At William Carey's death in 1528 Mary was left virtually destitute, and only the fact that the King was by then enamored of her sister Anne prevented him from being completely indifferent to her fate."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 43.

<sup>82</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 18.

### Chapter III.

#### Married at Court

Family was the center of life in Tudor England- the family you were born into, and the family you married into literally defined your life. Marriage was one of the key tools used by families during the reign of Henry VIII to increase social standing, with the aim of getting as close to the crown as possible for maximum wealth and power.

Marriages were arranged by both men and women with hopes of gaining the maximum advantage for their separate families and in hopes of creating a new line of nobles that could work to best serve their families.<sup>83</sup> The relationship between private family affairs and public affairs was blurred during this time, leading to an emphasis on patronage and kinship relationships. This increasing emphasis on kinship and patronage relationships required both sexes to participate in forming and maintaining these relationships.

According to Barbara Harris,

What lay behind this phenomenon was the fact that the world of kinship, the great household, client/patron relations, and the court conflated concerns that we would label as either personal or political and virtually ignored the distinction between the public and the private. Thus women moved unselfconsciously into the world of politics as they fulfilled their responsibilities as wives, mothers, and widows; when they did so, they engaged with surprising frequency in activities that even the dichotomies of contemporary social paradigms would recognize as political and public.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 260.

<sup>84</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 260.

The importance of marriage is paramount- wives wielded increased authority and power in their own right during this time. This importance is not to be underestimated as wives served not only their husbands, and the families they marriage into but also the family they were born into, while aiming to create and empower a family of their own. They did all this while working to gain power, influence, and increase wealth independently and in the broader context of their familial relationships. Additionally reputations, rewards, and punishments were rarely given to one member of a family, instead when one was lifted up or dragged down the consequences had far reaching implications for the entire family.

The queen's goddaughter Kateryn Parr at age sixteen was given in marriage to Edward Borough of Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, the eldest son and heir of Sir Thomas Borough. For the next seven years, her life would be lived first in Lincolnshire as Borough's wife and after his death in 1533 in Yorkshire as the third wife of John Neville, third Lord Latimer. In 1536 Latimer's actions during the uprising known as the Pilgrimage of Grace irrevocably compromised his reputation in the eyes of the king, resulting in the more or less forced removal of the family from their center of power in the north. With her return to the south, Lady Latimer rejoined the circles at court. By this time her mother was dead as was the queen she had served but Mary's memories of Maud Parr were warm ones and they provided an entrée for Lady Latimer to join Mary's household, an establishment that by December 1542, as Imperial ambassador Chapuys noted in dispatches, the king was visiting with curious frequency (. Lord Latimer died in March 1543 and the following June, John Dudley, Lord Lisle, wrote that Kateryn, together with her sister Anne, were "in the court with the Ladies Mary and Elizabeth". Three weeks later Kateryn married Henry VIII and became queen of England.<sup>85</sup>

We see here that Catherine's lifelong connection to the Crown in her relationship in the court and around the court, beginning with her baptism had lasting implications.

Catherine was Henry's sixth wife, and he was her fourth husband, and their marriage

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<sup>85</sup> S. E. James, "Reputation and appropriation at the Tudor court: Queen Kateryn Parr and Anne Stanhope, Duchess of Somerset," *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, no. 6 (2019): 2.

appeared to be one of companionship instead of a political or dynastic match, as Henry already had an heir in his son Edward. This relationship that they formed, in all likelihood decades previously, was a result of longstanding familial relationships that their previous generations had created and nurtured overtime. The English monarchical political system at this time was based on a interconnected kinsman system, at which Catherine and Henry both held prominent places in, before and after their marriage. Catherine's position with Henry's daughters showcases the intimate nature of their relationship, and later in her life she would work to benefit both princesses and to strengthen the familial relationships.

### Marriage

The consummation of marriage was the mark of a marriage being fully sanctioned by the law and lack of consummation was grounds for annulment, leading to the event being a major event for new couples that was eagerly awaited by their respective families. Consummation normally occurred on the wedding night however cases arose in which consummation occurred later, generally due to the wife not reaching puberty as marked by beginning to menstruate.<sup>86</sup>

The role of the Queen was affirmed in the act of the coronation and was an opportunity only two of Henry's wives shared. Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn were both crowned after spending the night before the ceremony at the Tower of London. Catherine was crowned jointly with Henry whereas Anne was crowned alone.

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<sup>86</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 4.

Catherine and Henry were crowned on June 24, 1509 two weeks after their wedding. Catherine arrived at the Tower of London for her coronation on “Fridaie the twentie and two daie of Iune, euery thing beeyng in a readines.”<sup>87</sup> She stayed there two nights before an ornate coronation process meant to showcase the wealth and power that the new couple commanded. Additionally, the coronation procession was seen as an opportunity to show who held the King and Queens favor as their attendants were lavished in the most luxurious fabrics as seen in Hall’s Chronicle,

The next folowyng in ordre, came the Quenes retinew....The Quene, then by name Katheryne, sitting in her litter, borne by two White Plafries, the Litter couered and richely appareled and the Palfries Trapped in White clothe of backe of a very great length, bewtefull ad goodly to behold and on her hedde a Coronall set with many riche oriente stones... and then a Chariot couered and the ladies therein, all appareled in Clothe of Gold. And another sort of Ladies, and then another Chariot, then the Ladies next the Chariot, and so in ordre, euery after their degrees in clothe of Gold, Clothe of Siluer, Tynselles, and Veluet, with Embrouderies, euery couplement of thesaied Chariotes, and the draught harnesses, wer poudered with Armins, mixt with clothe of Gold: and with much joye and honor, came to Westminster, where was high preparacion made, aswell for thesaied Coronacion, as also for the solempne feast and Justes, thevpron to be had and doen.<sup>88</sup>

The expense that went into making sure that Catherine and other women of court were richly attired is no accident, the display of wealth also served as a display of strength. Henry decorated his court until they all glittered in elaborate and expensive costumes that were “freshe and goodly to behold.”<sup>89</sup> In a patriarchal society where women were generally seen as tools to be used these women were richly attired and given

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<sup>87</sup> Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle: Containing the History of England, During the Reign of Henry the Fourth, And the Succeeding Monarchs, to the End of the Reign of Henry the Eighth, In Which Are Particularly Described the Manners And Customs of Those Periods* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1809), 507.

<sup>88</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 507-8

<sup>89</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 509.

a place of prominence. The dual coronation ceremony put Catherine as his Queen, not just his wife or his consort. She was given a position of power and prominence in the most public way possible and in doing so the court ushered in a glittering new age.

To understand the significance of the ceremony itself one must keep in mind the belief in the divine right of rulers, appointed by God. Monarchs were believed to have been appointed by God to rule and to have Gods protection. By being crowned in the manner that she was, Catherine was assumed to have the divine right to rule, it is recorded that, “where according to the sacred obseruance, and auncient custome, his grace with the Quene, were anointed and crowned, by the Archebushop of Cantorbury with other prelates of the realme there present, and the nobilitie, with a greate multitude of Commons of the same.”<sup>90</sup>

### Fidelity

Henry VIII was not known for his fidelity to his Queens, but affairs were an expected occurrence for upper class men and women were expected to look the other way, ignoring their husbands indiscretion. During his marriage to Catherine of Aragon his mistresses did not reach prominent positions, until he began his dalliance with Anne Boleyn. Catherine regarded Henry’s affairs with a practiced resignation and tended to look the other way. During their marriage some notable mistresses included Anne’s older sister, Mary Boleyn, who he quickly disposed of in favor of her younger sister.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 510.

<sup>91</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 27-28.



During Henry's marriage to Anne, he was more ready to acquire mistresses. Anne and Henry's marriage was not without conflict, and one argument about an unnamed mistress ended with Henry "informing his wife 'that she must shut her eyes and endure as those who were better than herself had done'."<sup>92</sup> After that fight Henry took another unknown mistress, who was later dismissed from court for her indiscretions.<sup>93</sup> Henry's next known mistress was Anne's cousin, the maid of honor Madge Shelton who was a more favorable mistress than the others as she was not opposed to the Queen and did not aim to become the next Queen.<sup>94</sup> During Anne's next pregnancy, Henry began his flirtations with Jane Seymour, something uncommon for him as he was typically a faithful husband during his wives pregnancies.<sup>95</sup>

It was no secret that Henry was not attracted to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, who he never consummated his marriage with and shortly after their wedding in April of 1540 it was clear that he was becoming serious with one of her maids of honor, Catherine Howard.<sup>96</sup>

### Publicly Acknowledging Marriage

Oftentimes when referencing the historical record one can see public markers of pride in a particular marriage, such as jubilant celebrations regarding politically

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<sup>92</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 26.

<sup>93</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 26.

<sup>94</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 27.

<sup>95</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 27.

<sup>96</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 37.

advantageous matches, for instance Henry VIII's sister Margaret Tudor's marriage to James IV of Scotland . Henry VIII provides us with examples with several of his queens, the first being Catherine of Aragon.

### Fights / Strain

Like marriages today, some were peaceful, and others were filled with strife. Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII's marriage began quite wonderfully but as time progressed and no living male heir appearing, their relationship became strained. Catherine became increasingly withdrawn and pious with each loss and in doing so spent less and less time in the company of the king and the court as a whole. She traded festivities for masses, and her gaiety decreased with Anne Somerset writing that, "as Catherine grew older her enthusiasm for these ponderous frivolities waned."<sup>97</sup> Henry and Anne Boleyn's marriage was one that frequently had conflict. Anne kept Henry enthralled in part through his immense sexual attraction to her, which waned during her pregnancies but always returned. However, attraction only goes so far and her "injudicious tantrums and frenzied insistence that Henry adopt harsher measures against Catherine and Mary did much to erode this renewed affection."<sup>98</sup>

### Life as a Married Courtier

Aristocratic wives during the Tudor era had increased power and authority over their homes and children, but those benefits came with increased responsibilities and

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<sup>97</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 16.

<sup>98</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 26.

duties both inside the home and in society. These women had access to power, independently and in partnership with their husbands, and were more than willing to use it and their influence to get what they needed, be it for themselves or for members of their kinship network. During this time, the line between private life and public affairs was increasingly blurred and women were able to slip with ease between the two worlds. Women entered the male world on a scale they had not in the past, both in daily life and legally, for example,

According to a reading at the Inner Temple in 1503, the common law permitted both married and single women to serve as justices of the peace. Although I have not found any example of their doing so, Margaret, countess of Richmond, did hold a special commission to administer justice in the North in the last years of Henry VII's reign. Much later, in the 1530s, Anne, Lady Berkeley, served on a commission established to inquire into disturbances in one of her parks. She sat with the panel when it selected a jury, heard evidence, and found the accused, including two of her brothers-in-law, Sir Nicholas Poyntz and Maurice Berkeley, guilty of riot and other misdemeanours.<sup>99</sup>

Women's political power during this time was increasing independently of their husbands and their families. A carefully cultivated network of friends, family members, and allies allowed women increased liberties during the Tudor era including the ability to be outwardly politically active. Political involvement no longer was restricted to closed door social gatherings where one covertly worked to gain political influence, instead women openly campaigned for positions and roles such as in the following two cases,

In 1536, for example, Katherine Blount campaigned for the election of her eldest son George as one of the knights of the shire from Shropshire. According to Dame Blount, 'the worshipful of the shire, with the justices' had approached her 'to make labour for his election'. Attributing his defeat to the riotous behaviour of the burgesses of Shrewsbury, who drowned out the voices of the county elite, she petitioned Cromwell (unsuccessfully) to reject the sheriff's return and seat her son instead. Lady Elizabeth Copley was the only elector at Gatton, Surrey after her

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<sup>99</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 269.

husband, Sir Roger, died in 1549. She sent her son Thomas to three Marian parliaments.<sup>100</sup>

As seen above women had the ability to be outwardly political to the point of direct campaigning, with those efforts meeting at times with success. This outward political influence showcased the increasing authority that women were given during this time. Tudor noble women had a greater level of education than her predecessors in addition to an increased amount of power inside and outside of the household that was used in a way that produced tangible results. These women's powers were in relations to their husbands, families, and members of their patronage networks and were used at times to, "secure offices, annuities and other favors."<sup>101</sup> An example of this occurred below,

In 1523, for example, Lady Maud Parr asked Thomas Lord Dacre to help her cousin 'in such causes as he hath to [i.e. in] your parts'. Edith, Lady Darcy, asked her son, Ralph, earl of Westmorland, to take two brothers, 'which be tall gentlemen', into his service. Mary, duchess of Suffolk, the countesses of Rutland, Salisbury, and Sussex, and Margery Horsman all petitioned the Lisles on behalf of friends or dependents during the years Viscount Lisle was Lord Deputy of Calais. Elizabeth, Lady Dacre, asked her brother, Francis, fifth earl of Shrewsbury, to make sure two of her husband's servants received justice from the council in the North. On another occasion, his half-sister Anne, countess of Pembroke, sought a vacant stewardship on one of his manors for a neighbour, assuring him that if he granted her petition, she would be ready to 'gratify' his. Catherine, countess of Westmorland, secured her brother-in-law, the duke of Norfolk's, help in intervening with Thomas Cromwell on behalf of one of her husband's servants, who had committed a robbery. Some years later, she petitioned the earl of Shrewsbury to appoint a different member of the same family to the king's service on the borders.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 267-8.

<sup>101</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 267.

<sup>102</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 267.

As this example shows these petitions were not exclusively to benefit the immediate family. It was not uncommon for women to petition on behalf of those that served them. Members of the nobility oftentimes oversaw the moral, legal, and social standards of the day, especially in regard to those who lived on their lands, or within their territories. Generally speaking, men oversaw the legal matters within their sphere of influence but there were occasions when women held direct political influence and power. For example, Lady Berkley,

packed the jury at the local sessions to prevent a clergyman, John Barlo, from presenting fourteen people for playing tennis on Sunday during divine service. After that, according to Barlo, she suborned a commission of gaol delivery, which indicted him for various trespasses. He claimed that one of the alleged offences occurred when he had arrested a priest in her service for keeping outlawed books that defended the bishop of Rome. Sir Nicholas Poyntz again appeared among Lady Berkeley's enemies, this time as one of Barlo's allies.<sup>103</sup>

Lady Berkeley was one of several female members of the Tudor nobility who after the death of her husband had significant political and social power independent of any man. As a widow she held a unique role in society and was able to hold political power independently, but in that aspect, she was not alone; other notable widows include “Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury, Anne, Lady Scrope, and Dame Katherine Blount.”<sup>104</sup> A woman’s marital status and relationship to her spouse did tend to directly impact their political power and ability to operate independently in society. We see several women who were able to combine matrimony and social and political power including women like,

Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury, Anne, Lady Scrope, and Dame Katherine Blount were also widows; others, like Margaret Countess of Richmond, and

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<sup>103</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 269.

<sup>104</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 269-270.

Katherine Willoughby, duchess of Suffolk, were married, but had anomalous relationships with their husbands. The duchess of Suffolk, an heiress and baroness in her own right, remained a widow for seven years after her first husband died and then married her gentleman-usher, Richard Bertie, a choice that gave her considerable autonomy.<sup>105</sup>

These women, while holding significant power and authority, were exceptions rather than the rule. More usually, women shared authority with their husbands rather than separately from them. Figures like Richmond and Suffolk were able to exert direct political influence and power instead of going the more traditional route of “offer(ing) to return favors 'with a like pleasure.’”<sup>106</sup> Many of the women engaging in this practice were working in partnership with their husbands. Barbara Harris writes that,

Many of the most energetic women shared their husbands' regional political responsibilities. Elizabeth Lady Dacre, wife of Lord William, reported to her husband in great detail on the state of the borders and relations with Scotland whenever he was away from home. She interpreted the information she transmitted and occasionally advised him on the action he should take. In 1534, for example, she suggested that if peace with Scotland were concluded, he should urge the king and council to appoint wardens on the borders with full traditional authority 'and not to be disobeyed [as you] were by Sir William Musgrave and his deputy...'. Later that year, Musgrave's mother, Lady Jane, took the initiative in trying to heal the breach between her son and the third duke of Norfolk that resulted from his role in accusing William Lord Dacre of treason. At her insistence, Sir William accompanied her to visit the duke, who told him that the only remedy for his action was to marry his son and heir to Dacre's daughter; if he refused, 'it should be to the utter subversion of... [his] house and successors ... like how the house of Bergavenny had subverted the house of Guildford.<sup>107</sup>

These examples go to show the traditional levels of power that noble women held in Tudor England, showing that the expression ‘behind every great man is a great woman’ held true. While women did not tend to directly hold political power, they still

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<sup>105</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 269-270.

<sup>106</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 270.

<sup>107</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 270.

maintained a sphere of influence and power that was not to be disregarded. Generally speaking, a woman's power related directly to her husband and tended to be "related to public affairs and often, indeed, to sensitive political matters."<sup>108</sup> Women who were in partnership with their husbands tended to exert their political influence to best serve and assist them, such as in the following case.

Elizabeth, duchess of Norfolk, and Lady Cecil Maunsell both asked, for example, that their mates be relieved of their respective duties on the borders and in Ireland. In 1523, Henry VIII's second cousin, Elizabeth, countess of Kildare, sent Wolsey a long analysis of the situation in Ireland in which she charged Piers Butler, false claimant to the earldom of Ormond, with persecuting her husband and exposing the king's English subjects to the depredations of the Irish. On another occasion, she asked George, fourth earl of Shrewsbury, to ignore false reports that her husband was oppressing his tenants in Wexford. The countess was so effective in supporting the Fitzgerald earls of Kildare that in 1535 a supporter of Cromwell's anti-Fitzgerald policy observed that if the widowed countess returned to Ireland, 'she could do no good.'<sup>109</sup>

As seen in the above cases women were more than willing to directly intervene on behalf of their husbands in regard to private and public matters. Some of these matters were related to health, such as in the case of "Lady Anne Russell (who) asked Cromwell's help in getting Doctor Buttes, Henry VIII's physician, to attend her husband."<sup>110</sup> Others were financial in nature, such as in the cases of "Katherine Audelett (who) approached Cromwell for help in resolving her husband's lawsuit with the abbot of Abingdon, while Lady Eleanor Brereton requested that a payment her husband owed the crown be postponed because of expenses he had incurred going to Ireland at the king's

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<sup>108</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 272.

<sup>109</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 272.

<sup>110</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 272.

command.”<sup>111</sup> Wives worked on behalf of their husbands in more serious matters as well, particularly during the political crises of the 1530’s and 1540’s. During this period many women petitioned directly to Cromwell in hopes of achieving the most favorable results possible, some of these pleas were met with success including the following example,

In early 1537, Lady Elizabeth Musgrave wrote to Cromwell because Sir William seemed to be out of favour despite his co-operation in repressing the Pilgrimage of Grace. She observed, his 'heaviness must needs be mine, by god's law that hath joined us together in marriage'. Besides asking Cromwell to be her husband's 'good and favourable lord', Lady Musgrave requested that he be excused from further service in the North; he was so alienated 'against the country for their rebellion' that he never wanted to live there again.<sup>112</sup>

Wives did, at times, act on behalf of their husbands in other ways including engaging in acts that they would need pardoned for as well. In the case of Margaret Wortley, we see her confessing to

intercepting and hiding the summons because her husband was 'sore troubled with sickness, being weak and very feeble, not able to labor without danger of his life'. Like Lady Musgrave, she justified herself by appealing to her duty as a wife: '[I] retain the same from his knowledge, with all other things that should augment his sickness, as god's laws bind me...'. She asked Cromwell to spare her mate until he could travel safely.<sup>113</sup>

The theme of owing one’s husband a “wifely duty” will reappear time and time again in Tudor England. Women were subject to their husband’s will and their societal and social role was to serve their husband, and their families at large, with loyalty. Women were treated by some as being frail and vulnerable to unhealthy influences and urges and were given leniency in their wrongdoings that was not extended to their male

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<sup>111</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 272.

<sup>112</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 272-3.

<sup>113</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 273.



counterparts. In this way women were able to petition on behalf of themselves and those they loved in a way that men could not- as the more emotionally driven sex that is obligated to work toward a man's will what choice did they have? Women were assumed to lack knowledge about political intricacies and conspiracies and therefore made the perfect vessel to petition for freedom when they, or their loved ones, crossed the line between political grumblings and treason. For example,

In May 1534, after William Lord Dacre was indicated for treason, his wife Elizabeth, a daughter of George, fourth earl of Shrewsbury, wanted 'according to her duty' to plead to the king for him. Her father asked Cromwell to advise her how to conduct herself, since 'she hath not been accustomed or brought up in any affairs or uncomfortable business, but after the homely fashion of the country'. Although no accounts of her appearance before Henry survive, Lady Dacre did apparently go to court and present her suit to him. A month later, the king ordered her to stop her appeals until after her husband's trial.<sup>114</sup>

As seen above, at times these pleas fell on deaf ears, but on other occasions their pleas were effective.

### Gifts

Gift giving was an important part of Tudor culture and was used to maintain connections with fellow members of the nobility. For example, Lady Lisle was a notable gift giver throughout the reigns of Henry's various queens with Anne Somerset writing that,

Lady Lisle not only frequently sent gifts and tokens to influential courtiers and court ladies, as we have seen, but she also cultivated less prominent figures like Anne Boleyn's receiver-general, George Taylor. In addition, she sent the king and queen cherries, quails and dotterels in the same way that the gentry donated

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<sup>114</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 273.

provisions to the households of the nobles or courtiers who dominated their neighbourhoods.<sup>115</sup>

### Duties as a Married Woman

Wives were able to influence their husbands, and the actions of their families particularly behind the scenes. Henry's six wives were no different, and all attempted to influence him in some manner at some time. The results varied, and even his favorite wife Jane Seymour was, "was stingingly rebuked when she implored Henry to halt the dissolution of the monasteries, and she was unable to secure the return to court of his daughter Mary until the latter had acknowledged the royal supremacy, forsworn Rome and declared herself illegitimate."<sup>116</sup>

Women had a unique role during the reign of Henry VIII, in part due to their humanist education that they shared with their brothers. Mazzola writes that,

Ironically, early modern sons trained by humanist tutors in right living, classical rhetoric, and service to the state often found themselves reporting to Henry VIII's women, early modern wives and daughters who possessed unusual authority, learning, and room to manoeuvre politically. This was especially true as Henry became either too ill or too preoccupied to closely monitor the royal schoolroom sponsored by his court. Increasingly bureaucrats had replaced soldiers as advisors to the king and, in turn, the role of courtier was redefined by the women at Henry's court into that of translator, publisher, preacher, teacher.<sup>117</sup>

### Life of a Courtier

Courtiers had reason to try to be in the crown's good graces, with political favor come the appointment of lands that would generate income and court was costly by

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<sup>115</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 271.

<sup>116</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 32.

<sup>117</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 3.

design. When courtiers had to spend large amounts of money keeping up appearances, they lacked disposable income to engage in acts that would be detrimental to the crown. In certain occasions the crown would take on the expense to attire courtiers, but generally speaking they were required to outfit themselves. Following the coronation of Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII women were luxuriously attired in elaborate and expensive costumes as recorded in Hall's Chronicle,

In which arber were. vi. ladies, all appareiled in white satyn and grene, set and ambroudered full of H. & K. of golde, knytte together with laces of golde and damaske, & all their garments were replenished with glytteryng spangles gylt ouer, on their heddes were bonettes all opened at the iiii. quarters, ouerfrysed with flat gold of damaaske, y fassis of their head set full of new deuised facionsL in this gardē, also was the kyng and. v. with him appareiled in garmētes of purple satyn, all of cuttes w H. & K. euery edge gardished with frysed gold, & euery persone had his name in like letters of massy gold.<sup>118</sup>

Henry certainly had a love of beauty and ensured his court was filled with beautiful women who were luxuriously appareled. His wives were no different and, “In 1511 and 1512 Catherine of Aragon gave her chamberers (untitled women who assisted the ladies of the Privy Chamber in their duties) Mabel Clifford and Margaret Pennington gowns of crimson velvet and russet satin respectively.”<sup>119</sup> His third wife Jane Seymour had an exacting fashion sense and was incredibly particular when it came to the ladies of her household. She once allowed a lady in waiting to wear her French wardrobe under the stipulations “that she must obtain 'a bonnet and frontlet of velvet', headgear which the regretful Hussey considered infinitely less flattering than Anne's own French hood.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 518.

<sup>119</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 14.

<sup>120</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 33.

While being so picky with appearance, Jane was also incredibly generous and outfitted the ladies of her Privy Chamber bejeweled girdles to wear.<sup>121</sup> The birth of Prince Edward, the future heir, on October 12, 1537 gave Jane the ability to make increased demands upon her ladies and husband, and the first of those were for her ladies to acquire “new gowns not only for Prince Edward's christening but also for the churching of the Queen and the approaching Christmas festivities.”<sup>122</sup>

Henry VIII very much enjoyed pageants and other shows designed to entertain him and his courtiers, at times thrown in celebration for an event and others just at the whim of the king. After the wedding and subsequent coronation of Henry and Catherine of Aragon there was a lavish pageant with no expense spared, described in Hall's Chronicle as:

then was there a deuce or a pageaūt vpō wheles brought in, out of the which pageaūt issues out a gētelman rychelye appareiled that shewed, howe in a garden of pleasure there was an arber of golde, wherin were lords and ladies, moche desirious to shew pleasure and pastime to the Quene and ladies, if they might be licenced so to do, who answered by the Quene, how she and all other therw were very desirious to se theim and their pastime: then a great clothe of Arras that did hang before the same pageant was taken awaye, & the pageaunt brought more nere, it was curiously unmade and pleasaūt to beholde, it was solempne and ryche, for euery post or pillar therof, was cōuered with fries golde.<sup>123</sup>

Henry was deeply in love with his wife, Catherine, and sought to please her any way he could. In addition to his new marriage, his new role as king which led to a never ending rotation of “pageants, feasts and tournaments.”<sup>124</sup> The new couple and the

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<sup>121</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 14.

<sup>122</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 33.

<sup>123</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 518.

<sup>124</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 15.

accompanying court regularly embarked on “woodland picnics and rural expeditions, and regular tournaments were held in honour of the ladies, the King himself competing gallantly in the lists.”<sup>125</sup> The evenings were full of feasts, dances, and masques which were performed “by courtiers and ladies in disguise, who first enacted a series of well-rehearsed dance steps and then invited various members of the audience to join them for a more impromptu session of dancing.”<sup>126</sup> All the events in celebration of the newlyweds and the new King came at some cost, but none so much as masques which were quite expensive due to the required expensive costumes and scenery.<sup>127</sup> Due to the prohibitive cost of regular masques Henry began creating his love of playing pretend by dressing up as different folk characters including Robin Hood to visit Catherine and her ladies in waiting who would pretend to be none the wiser.<sup>128</sup>

Henry had a love of beauty and gaiety and worked hard to ensure that his court was a place of pageantry and fun. His marriage to Catherine Howard reinvigorated him and saw him working hard to please and entertain her with many courtly events and lavish gifts of gown and jewels.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 16.

<sup>126</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 16.

<sup>128</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 16.

<sup>129</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 39.

## Following the King

King Henry was on a mission to please and entertain his new wife, the young and gay Catherine Howard, however he was infirm due to the ulcer on his leg and by March of 1541 he had to step back from courtly entertainment, leaving the court a subdued place. His young wife was anxious for his recovery and the return to celebrations and when Henry was recovered enough by that summer they began on a “northern progress” during which “he toured in state Lincoln, Pontefract and York.”<sup>130</sup>

## Serving a Queen

The Queen was constantly surrounded by members of her household, whose duties varied as did their relationships to the monarch. More prominent ladies would wait “on the Queen whenever there was a special occasion at court, such as a banquet, christening or a reception for a foreign ambassador, while their colleagues, the ladies of the Privy Chamber, kept the Queen company at other times, sitting with her in her Chamber and attending to her everyday requirements.”<sup>131</sup> Regardless of rank those serving the Queen often performed lowly tasks, for example,

the Marchioness of Exeter, married to one of England's foremost peers, waited on Queen Jane Seymour at table, handing her the basin of water for her pre-prandial wash, while Anne Boleyn was attended at her coronation banquet by the Countesses of Oxford and Worcester who intermittently 'did hold a fine cloth before the Queen's face when she list to spit or do otherwise at her pleasure.'<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 13.

<sup>131</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 13.

<sup>132</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 13.

Despite the oftentimes tedious tasks, being a professional lady-in-waiting was a lucrative career path for members of the nobility and some women worked in each of Henry's six wives' households. For example, "Anne Parr started her career as a maid of honour to Catherine of Aragon and progressed to being chief lady of the Privy Chamber under Henry's sixth Queen, her sister Catherine Parr, while the appointment of the matronly Mrs. Stonor as official chaperone to all the unmarried girls in royal service also spanned the whole reign."<sup>133</sup> This career path was one of the few open to noblewomen or the ladies of the non-noble gentry.<sup>134</sup> Barbara Harris writes that the relationship one had to the crown was of paramount importance because

the personal relationships that ultimately determined whom he (Henry VIII) would promote to office and who would benefit from the vast patronage at his disposal. In the eyes of the early Tudor aristocracy, distributing this patronage, in the form of offices, wardships, land, annuities, and other privileges, was one of the most important functions of the monarchy. Accordingly, members of the elite conceived of politics as a way of increasing their wealth and power by gaining access to the bounty of the crown. Since success depended on winning and retaining the king's favour, the upper classes naturally turned to the court as the centre of the political process.<sup>135</sup>

When being close to the seat of power was of utmost importance, competition for these placements was fierce. As Henry's court evolved to fit him, and his needs, over time the size of his court grew. Originally "the court ladies of the early Tudor period, included members of the queen's household and the royal nursery and the wives, sisters,

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<sup>133</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 14-5.

<sup>134</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 14.

<sup>135</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 259.

and daughters of the king's closest friends and favorite servants.”<sup>136</sup> As time progressed these numbers grew substantially, as seen below,

Their numbers were always small: in the early years of Henry VIII's reign, for example, Catherine of Aragon's household included eight ladies-in-waiting and eight ladies of the bedchamber and maids of honour.' In 1540, the queen's household consisted of eight 'great ladies', nine ladies and gentlewomen attendant, five maids-in-waiting, four gentlewomen of the privy chamber, and four chamberers." A document for 1546 listed twenty-five women in addition to the queen's maids as 'ordinary' members of the royal household and eleven as 'extraordinary' lodgers; these figures suggest the total number of women who might reasonably be considered 'ladies of the court' at any one time.'" Altogether, I have identified ninety-seven women who held court offices during the reigns of Henry VII and VIII and thirty- three others who received allowances from the royal household but never held such posts.<sup>137</sup>

Catherine of Aragon's household included a minority of Spanish attendants brought with her from her homeland, however she was cautious not to favor them and to integrate them into English society with her. Two of these ladies-in-waiting, Inez de Venegas and Maria de Salinas, stayed with Catherine from her arrival in England to her time as an outcast after the death of Arthur to her regaining prominence as Queen of England and Henry's bride and they were rewarded with prominent marriages.<sup>138</sup>

Catherine's court size and the way she set it up was likely inspired, at least in part, to her mother Isabel of Castile's court. Catherine, like her mother, had noblewomen of varying rank and status surrounding her who were paid handsomely for their service.

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<sup>136</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 274.

<sup>137</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 274.

<sup>138</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 22.



Both women's courts were on the smaller side, yet the connections they made with their attendants were powerful and often lifelong.<sup>139</sup>

Álvaro Fernández de Córdoba Miralles counted 92 women at Isabel's court, 61 who served the queen, with thirteen in the household of the *infanta* María, six for *infanta* Catalina. The Isabelline court appears to be typical of the age but much smaller than that of later queens, Isabel of Valois (178 women) and Mariana of Austria (over 300 women).<sup>140</sup>

Their court sizes were smaller than their counterparts, and the members of their courts were carefully hand selected for their rank, personality, and unique skillsets with each attendant receiving specific duties.

Additionally, Catherine followed in her mother's footsteps when it came to paying her staff, with male and female payments varying by gender, and by skillset with women making significantly less than their male counterparts. For instance,

Beatriz Galindo, who had served Isabel for years and married one of Isabel's secretaries (Francisco de Madrid), was paid far less than the Geraldino brothers, only 15,000 *maravedís* annually<sup>38</sup>. Galindo, the author of commentaries on Aristotle and a book of Latin verse, was educated at one of the colleges at the University of Salamanca and may have been of Antonio Nebrija's students, so it was likely her sex, not the quality of her education that explains the discrepancy in her salary.<sup>141</sup>

Clearly there was a significant discrepancy based on gender norms, but that said Catherine and Isabel's female attendants received marriage gifts which could come in the form of significant sums of money or valuable objects. Gift giving was an important part of Catherine's culture before coming to England and began with the culture of wearing

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<sup>139</sup> Theresa M. Earenfight, "Raising Infanta Catalina De Aragón to Be Catherine Queen of England," *Anuario De Estudios Medievales* 46, no. 1 (2016): 425.

<sup>140</sup> Earenfight, "Raising Infanta," 425.

<sup>141</sup> Earenfight, "Raising Infanta," 426-7

shoes several times before gifting them to one of her attendants to symbolize their close and intimate relationship. Other gifts were given to her attendants, particularly gifts of clothing and trinkets of affection, another trend Catherine continued in England which her predecessors began. Like her mother Catherine was not required to give gifts to her attendants, yet both gave generously to those they shared an intimate relationship.

Between the death of Jane Seymour and the arrival of Anne of Cleves, the ladies-in-waiting of the court were without employment and without the free lodging that serving the Queen provided, were forced to return to their husbands or families estates. Unmarried women oftentimes returned home or journeyed with a married lady to her estate.<sup>142</sup> Upon Anne's arrival to England from Cleves,

her household had already been selected and was filled to the point that she was hard pressed to find a role for the fifteen attendants that had journeyed with her from Cleves and as a result the majority had to return to Cleves. Anne did not receive a particularly warm welcome from her fashionable household, with an ambassador from France describing her "as 'even inferior in beauty to their mistress and . . . moreover dressed after a fashion so heavy and tasteless that it would make them appear frightful even if they were belles.'"<sup>143</sup>

Securing a role in the Queen's household meant being one step closer to the seat of power and so families worked hard to ensure their wives and daughters were placed in prominent spots. Lady Lisle and Anne Bassett provide a good example of the lengths women would go to place a relative in the Queen's household during their efforts to find a place for Anne's sister Katherine Basset. When Anne failed to secure a place for her sister through the typical female channels, she presented King Henry with a jar of homemade jam before asking for her sister to join her at court as a lady-in-waiting to

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<sup>142</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 25.

<sup>143</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 36.

Anne of Cleves, or in any other capacity. Henry “merely replied that he would only appoint those such as were 'fair and meet for the room', attributes that he was evidently far from certain that Katherine Basset possessed.”<sup>144</sup> Anne and Lady Lisle did eventually get what they wanted and Katherine was appointed to Anne’s household briefly before the marriage was dissolved.

Catherine Howard’s family benefited greatly from her Queenship and “her cousin, the Duchess of Richmond, her attendants included her aunt Lady William Howard, her cousin Lady Denny, and her sisters, Lady Arundel and Lady Baynton. Lady Rochford, another Howard connection, retained her position as lady of the Privy Chamber.”<sup>145</sup> Her family and friends, including those she lived with at her grandmother’s home, all vying for a position in the new Queen’s court. Four of Catherine’s former living companions, Joan Bulmer, Katherine Tylney, Margaret Morton, and Alice Restwold, joined her at court as chamberers to the Queen but not all entered into her service without pleas,

Joan Bulmer, a young lady who had connived with Catherine over her romance with Francis Dereham, assisting the semi-literate girl in the composition of her love-letters, was swift to approach her former friend, beseeching her 'To have in your remembrance the unfeigned love that my heart hath always borne towards you, I know the Queen of England will not forget her secretary.'<sup>146</sup>

It was vital to Catherine to keep those that knew of her youthful indiscretions at court close and compliant in hopes they would not let tales of her dalliances while she resided under her grandmother’s care slip. That said, her favorite attendant was Lady

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<sup>144</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 36.

<sup>145</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 39.

<sup>146</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 39.

Rochford, and such favoritism did not go unnoticed or without resentment.<sup>147</sup> This resentment was greater in those who resided with Catherine while she was in her grandmother's care and yet did not receive a place in Catherine's court. Mary Lassel's was one of those ladies, much to her brother John's dismay. When reprimanded by her brother for her lack of place at court Mary "retorted that she had no wish to be employed by someone 'light both in conditions and living'."<sup>148</sup> Mary went on to inform her brother of Catherine's affairs with Francis Dereham and Henry Manox who went on to inform the appropriate parties. By November 2, 1541, Henry VIII was informed of Catherine's indiscretions at Hampton Court, which he denied and ordered an investigation into the allegations believing his wife to be innocent. When Dereham and Manox were questioned they admitted that the allegations were true, ending Catherine's tenure as Queen- and her life.

#### Unfavorable Unions

Henry VIII was not the only nobleman in England to be deceived by a portrait into marrying a woman who was not as comely as she was portrayed. When Henry met Anne, he "had not been able to control his disgust for his coarse-featured Flemish bride," and his lack of attraction to her led to the marriage remaining unconsummated.<sup>149</sup> Henry regularly spent the night in his wife's chambers, leading to her ladies to question if she could possibly be pregnant,

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<sup>147</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 39.

<sup>148</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 40.

<sup>149</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 37.

When, in answer to their questions, Anne insisted that she could not possibly be pregnant, Lady Edgcombe impertinently enquired, 'How is it possible for Your Grace to know that and lie every night with the King?' Lady Rochford solved the conundrum: 'By our Lady, Madam, I think Your Grace is a maid still?' she suggested, and her suspicions were confirmed by Anne's ingenuous reply. 'Why,' she said, 'when he comes to bed, he kisses me and taketh me by the hand and biddeth me, "Good night Sweetheart", and in the morning kisses me and biddeth me "Farewell darling". Is not this enough?' 'Madam,' remarked Lady Rochford with feeling, 'there must be more than this or it will be long 'ere we have a Duke of York, which all this realm most desireth.'<sup>150</sup>

Henry's inability to consummate the marriage in conjunction to his complete and utter lack of attraction to his wife led to their divorce, partly on the grounds that the marriage remained unconsummated.<sup>151</sup>

#### Marriage Annulment, Divorce, Execution of a Spouse

When Henry VIII broke from the Catholic Church and formed the Anglican Church in efforts to marry Anne Boleyn his marriage to Catherine of Aragon was annulled on the grounds that she had consummated the marriage with Henry's bother, Arthur. The annulment of their marriage led to their only living child, their daughter Mary, becoming considered illegitimate. Upon this ruling she was ordered to give up all "jewels and plate," a request that was denied "until she had received the express command of the King."<sup>152</sup>

Divorce was incredibly uncommon during the early modern era in England although it was not impossible to achieve. Henry VIII famously broke from the Catholic

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<sup>150</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 37.

<sup>151</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 37.

<sup>152</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 24.

Church, creating the Anglican Church, in an effort to rid himself of Catherine of Aragon. From the beginning, their relationship did not follow the normal course as Catherine had previously married Henry's older brother, Arthur, who died shortly after their marriage. Catherine claimed that they never consummated the marriage and Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon received a special dispensation from the Pope at the time, Pope Clement VII, to marry. Henry began looking into the possibility of divorcing Catherine in 1527, as they had no living legitimate male heir and, in the process, Cardinal Wolsey began to gain information on Catherine that would serve him in the divorce process. One of Catherine's ladies the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk, Agnes Howard, testified that Catherine had consummated her marriage with Arthur at the Blackfriars court. Her testimony would go on to serve her well in Anne's court as she was honored at Anne's coronation and at banquets, and her mother Lady Wiltshire "took precedence over all other ladies of the realm."<sup>153</sup>

Henry's relationship with Anne Boleyn grew so intense that by the spring of 1527 he was actively seeking a way to end his marriage with Catherine of Aragon in order to wed Anne, either through divorce or annulment.<sup>154</sup> Catherine, a devout Catholic, resolutely refused to divorce Henry and as such, Cardinal Wolsey was sent to Rome in order to persuade Pope Clement VII to grant the couple a speedy divorce, ideally ending with Catherine entering into a nunnery and Henry remarrying Anne in hopes of producing a legitimate heir. These efforts failed, leading Cardinal Wolsey to "Cardinal Campeggio's legatine court at Blackfriars in May 1529 (where) it was referred back to

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<sup>153</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 22.

<sup>154</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 20.

Rome without a verdict having been reached.”<sup>155</sup> Anne firmly believed that Wolsey did not work in her interest and as such she poisoned her husband against her.<sup>156</sup>

Catherine was permanently abandoned by Henry in July of 1531 when he fled Windsor Castle in the early morning and sending her off to increasingly out of the way palaces and limiting her resources and the size of her staff. In 1532 Thomas Cromwell came to Henry with the idea of extraditing England from the grips of the Catholic Church and forming a church independent of their rules and the papacy. By January of 1533 Anne was pregnant and Henry needed a legitimate male heir, and so on January 25 they were secretly wed. Five months later, on May 23, 1533, Archbishop Crammer “formally pronounced Henry's marriage to Catherine null and void. He did so not with the authority of the See of Rome, but by virtue of the acts pioneered through Parliament by Cromwell, creating Henry Supreme Head of the Church in England.”<sup>157</sup>

Anne of Cleves was introduced to the idea of her annulment at Richmond in July of 1540, where she wisely obliged when it was claimed that their marriage was illegitimate. She was established at Richmond and was given a position as the “leading lady of the realm save for Catherine herself and the Princesses of the blood.”<sup>158</sup>

### Execution of Spouse

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<sup>155</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 20.

<sup>156</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 20.

<sup>157</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 21.

<sup>158</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 20.

When annulment and divorce were no longer options, the King turned to the only remaining choice - execution. Henry, ready to rid himself of his second wife, formed a commission on April 24, 1536 to investigate Anne's fidelity; this commission was led by Thomas Cromwell and the Duke of Norfolk.<sup>159</sup> This readiness to end his second marriage was due, in part, to Anne's miscarriage in early 1536 of a son which Henry showed no sympathy for. As a result of the loss and Henry's alienation of affections Anne sought solace in other men, and women, of the court.<sup>160</sup> The woman Henry had broken with the Catholic Church with and divorced his first wife for, Anne, was the first of Henry's wives to be executed under claims she had committed adultery with five men over the course of three years beginning in the fall of 1533. Anne was accused of committing adultery with Mary Smeaton, who admitted to the claims under torture. Henry Norris was arrested on May 1 for the same charge, followed by William Brereton, Thomas Weston, and Anne's own brother, George the Lord Rochford. A day later Anne herself was arrested and sent to the tower.<sup>161</sup> Jane Rochford claimed that "Anne and Rochford had claimed that Henry was impotent and mocked his incapacity, but that the Queen and her brother were guilty of incest together," and Cromwell claimed to have a letter detailing their incestuous crimes.<sup>162</sup> Anne denied any infidelity, but did admit to banter which could be construed as flirtations. With Henry Norris she "teased Norris that he was delaying his forthcoming marriage because he was in love with her; she added that at the time she had even

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<sup>159</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 28.

<sup>160</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 27.

<sup>161</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 29.

<sup>162</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 29.



suggested that if any harm came to his bride Norris would have liked to marry her, Anne, instead.”<sup>163</sup> It was claimed that Henry was the first of Anne’s paramours while she was married to the King. This alone was enough to sentence Henry Norris to his death. In the case of Mark Smeaton, she admitted that on one occasion she had chided him for “gazing at her in a lovestruck way.”<sup>164</sup> Her instance of flirtations with Weston are not detailed.<sup>165</sup> Within two weeks of arriving in the Tower, Anne was tried and on May 15, 1536 she was “convicted and sentenced to be beheaded or burnt at the King's pleasure.”<sup>166</sup> In total five aforementioned alleged lovers of Anne were found guilty and sentenced to death, and on May 17 they perished. Anne was beheaded May 19, 1536.<sup>167</sup> Henry was convinced that his wife used witchcraft to ensnare him and was determined that she was guilty of a myriad of crimes. His actions during the time of her imprisonment show that he was quite pleased with the results of his commission’s findings and that he was ready to be rid of her. Somerset writes, “Even while Anne was still in the Tower, the court had embarked on a frenzied round of gaiety, with Henry giving feasts for the ladies and staying up till after midnight. Chapuy’s remarked that Henry's delight was comparable to that 'a man feels in getting rid of a thin old vicious hack in the hope of getting soon a fine horse to ride.’”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 30.

<sup>164</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 30.

<sup>165</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 30.

<sup>166</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 30.

<sup>167</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 30.

<sup>168</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 30.

Catherine Howard's teenage indiscretions in addition to accusations that she had not been faithful to Henry were enough to sentence her to death. Catherine made a fatal mistake by not including all of her roommates from her time in her step-grandmother, the Duchess of Norfolk's, care in her households, specifically Mary Lassel's. Mary's confession about her time at Lambeth to her older brother John, particularly regarding "Catherine's intimacies with both Manox and Dereham" led to John informing the appropriate parties.<sup>169</sup> On November 2, 1541, Archbishop Cranmer informed Henry via a note which detailed Mary's confession. Henry immediately commenced an investigation into the allegations, believing them groundless, but unfortunately for Catherine both men confessed and her lady "Katherine Tylney had 'lien in the bed' with her and Dereham."<sup>170</sup> Additionally it was asserted that "Thomas Culpeper, a gentleman of the King's Privy Chamber, 'had succeeded him in the Queen's affections."<sup>171</sup> Catherine confessed to meeting with Culpepper, giving him gifts of a cap and ring, calling him her "little sweet fool", but claimed that the flirtations went no further.<sup>172</sup> Unfortunately for Catherine things only got worse as her ladies were questioned regarding their knowledge of Catherine's past and current indiscretions, finding that most of the ladies had some knowledge of the past indiscretions but knowledge of ongoing infidelity was uncertain.

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<sup>169</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 40.

<sup>170</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 40.

<sup>171</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 40.

<sup>172</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 40.

Catherine's ladies claimed that she was innocent of having an affair with Thomas Culpeper or any other men and yet provided evidence to the contrary.<sup>173</sup> Two of Catherine's ladies, Margaret Morton and Katherine Tylney, testified that Catherine had begun locking herself in her room at random intervals and not allowing any ladies but her favorite, Lady Rochford, to enter.<sup>174</sup> Whether it was jealousy or something more insidious in nature, the ladies in Catherine's household were more than willing to lay the blame on Lady Rochford. Lady Morton went on to say that "if the Queen had committed evil, she believed that Lady Rochford was 'The principal occasion of her folly,'" something Catherine was more than happy to follow.<sup>175</sup> The Queen claimed that it was "Lady Rochford who initially persuaded her to grant Culpeper the private audiences in her chamber, 'affirming that he desired nothing else but to speak with her and that she durst swear upon a book he meant nothing but honesty.'"<sup>176</sup> Culpeper also cast the blame onto Lady Rochford saying that she had "provoked him much to love the Queen" and had failed to chaperone their meetings by sleeping through them. This directly contradicted Lady Rochford's claim that "she believed Culpeper 'to have known the Queen carnally considering all things that she hath heard and seen between them.'"<sup>177</sup> Regardless, Lady Rochford knew better than the teenage Queen and was in the position to guide her and led her into temptation. Culpeper claimed that "that at each stage of the

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<sup>173</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 40.

<sup>174</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 40.

<sup>175</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 40.

<sup>176</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 41.

<sup>177</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 41.

summer progress it was the Queen who would 'at every house seek for the back stairs and back doors herself, in order that he could visit her unobserved."<sup>178</sup>

Catherine was sentenced to death due to her youthful indiscretions in addition to the mere possibility of having an affair with Thomas Culpepper and it was claimed that "the very fact that the Queen had employed Katherine Tylney as her chamberer, 'A woman who was privy to her naughty life before', was interpreted as 'proof of her will to return to her old abominable life and helped to secure the Queen's conviction on a capital charge."<sup>179</sup> When presented with the news that she would be sentenced to death for her 'crimes', Catherine had a mental breakdown which led to Henry sending "his own physicians to nurse her through this bout of mental illness."<sup>180</sup> Catherine had recovered enough to be executed on February 13, 1542 with all her ladies being "pardoned and released in February 1542" with the exception of the Duchess of Norfolk who was released in May of 1542. Henry was heartbroken following the revelations of his wife's time at Lambeth in addition to the possibility of his affair and court life shifted to something more subdued as a result.<sup>181</sup>

## Widowhood

Women's roles in lives were largely governed by their marital status and their phase in life. This chapter is divided into the largest sections of a woman's life, her time

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<sup>178</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 41.

<sup>179</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 41.

<sup>180</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 42.

<sup>181</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 42.

as a child, as a wife, and as a mother, and one's life was ruled by which phase of the life cycle one was in. Your marital status and status as a mother, or the absence of being one, controlled your daily life directly and indirectly. When one's power is tied so closely to one's spouse, we see that the absence of one leads to an increase of authority in the hands of the unmarried woman, generally speaking. Barbara Harris discusses the authority of women during the Tudor era. She writes that,

of the ninety- one women mentioned by name in this paper, fifty or 54.94 per cent were either heiresses, widows, or wives in second or third marriages; thirteen or 14.28 per cent were both heiresses and widowed or remarried. Having property of their own, even though they often could not control it during their marriages, apparently empowered women and gave them the confidence or ambition to become politically active.<sup>182</sup>

Widowed women possessed significantly more power than their married counterparts, on average, and these households tended to produce children that were more inclined to accept a woman's political power, for example Catherine Parr was born in 1512 to her widowed mother. This experience shaped her life and her personal interactions.<sup>183</sup>

In 1559 Archbishop Cranmer would publish the *Book of Common Prayer* including the commonly used marriage vow "till death do us part," an idea that was tested during Henry VIII's reign. Upon Henry's death on January 28, 1547, Catherine Parr entered widowhood as the stepmother to the King of England, Edward VI, and to the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth. This position led to Catherine being seen as the most eligible woman in England, a position she had for four months before marrying Thomas

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<sup>182</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 280.

<sup>183</sup> James, "Reputation," 2.

Seymour, Edward VII's uncle. Catherine had been planning on wedding Thomas before Henry had taken her as his bride, and it was in their household that the future Queen Elizabeth began to reside before scandal tainted their living situation.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 47.

## Chapter IV.

### Mother

A noblewoman was raised to continue the familial line and to improve the standing of the family she was born into, mainly through her own marriage and her status as a mother. The need for a legitimate male heir was apparent in almost, if not every, noble family and the responsibility to produce said heir landed almost exclusively on the woman- for better or for worse. Pregnancy and childbirth during this era had the inherent risk of death, making this an increasingly risky time in a woman's life.<sup>185</sup> If one made it through pregnancy and childbirth alive and with their newborn surviving, an impressive feat during this era, one would supervise the household or nursery of their child and oversee their upbringing. Mothers oversaw almost the entirety of the children's realm, meaning that mothers had to have a sufficient education to ensure the proper education of their children while still in the nursery. As their children aged mothers made sure their children were making and maintaining the appropriate social connections through social channels as well as wardships. As their children aged mothers began scouting potential matches and orchestrated advantageous marriages for their children before hopefully presiding as the matriarch over a large family with far reaching social influence.

### Childbirth

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<sup>185</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 264.

Pregnancy was almost always the cause for celebration, particularly in the case of the Queen. Catherine's multiple pregnancies, all but Mary's resulting in the death of her children, severely impacted her appearance and personality. Catherine went from a young, carefree Queen to a deeply religious, solemn woman who spent as much time as possible with her daughter Mary instead of engaging in courtly activities. Her change in demeanor and appearance did nothing to endure her husband to her, leading his affections to stray to those who were more willing to entertain him.<sup>186</sup>

Anne Boleyn quickly gained a reputation at court for her arguments and for the way she engaged her husband, with those occurrences increasing when she was with child. In September of 1534 Anne believed herself to be pregnant and her emotional outbursts increased, something the King tolerated as a means to an end. When she discovered that she was incorrect and was not, in fact, with child it led to strife with her husband, and all was not forgiven.<sup>187</sup> The relationship continued to be tumultuous, with intervals of peace between Henry and Anne leading to her pregnancy in the fall of 1535.<sup>188</sup>

Jane Seymour, unlike her predecessors, had little to no political ambitions and was content to be a wife and mother. In February of 1537 her first pregnancy was announced.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 17.

<sup>187</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 26.

<sup>188</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 27.

<sup>189</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 32.



Approximately six weeks before giving birth noblewomen would go into confinement, also called laying in, while they prepared for the imminent arrival of their new child. When Catherine of Aragon was pregnant with her son Henry, Duke of Cornwall, her pregnancy caused the court to remain at Richmond as Henry was waiting for the birth of his child, “it is to be noted at this tyme the Quene was great with childe, and shortly after this pastyme, she toke her chamber at Richemond, for the whichce cause the kynge kept his Christmas there.”<sup>190</sup>

When the mark of a successful marriage is multiple male heirs, to be without is to lack security. Henry VIII’s first two wives, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, both struggled to produce a healthy live child, and both experienced multiple miscarriages. Whitley and Kramer propose that this is explained by Henry VIII being a Kell positive male and both Anne and Catherine being Kell negative. The pair propose that Henry’s sexual partners experienced an increased rate of miscarriage than recorded potentially due to the lack of easily confirmed pregnancy. With poor nutrition and hygiene, pregnancy was not often confirmed until the second trimester, allowing for an increased possibility for first trimester miscarriages. Catherine had her first stillborn daughter on January 31, 1510, seven months and some days after their June 11, 1509 wedding date. She conceived again in late April producing a son, Henry the Prince of Wales on January 1, 1511 who passed on February 22, 1511. She had a third rumored pregnancy in September of 1511 that possibly culminated in a miscarriage. In October of 1513 Catherine gave birth to a son who was premature and did not survive. In November of 1514 she gave birth to a third son who died the same day. Catherine’s only surviving

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<sup>190</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 516.

child, the future Queen Mary, was born on February 18, 1516. It was rumored that she was pregnant in August of 1517, which would have ended in a miscarriage. In November of 1518 she gave birth to a second daughter who died soon after birth. Henry's affair with Bessie Blount culminated in a son, Henry Fitzroy, born on June 15, 1519 whom Henry acknowledged. Anne Boleyn gave birth to the future Queen Elizabeth I on September 7, 1533 which is in all likelihood her first pregnancy. She became pregnant again in January 1534 before going into labor in July; the child did not survive. She became pregnant again in March of 1535 and miscarried in June. Her final miscarriage came in January 1536; this child was a male. She was executed on May 19, 1536. Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife, gave birth to the future King Edward on October 12, 1537 before dying of complications related to childbirth. The above pregnancies definitively total eleven, and likely thirteen, and yet only four produced living children. Whitley and Kramer write that

the high rate of spontaneous late-term abortion, stillbirth, or rapid neonatal death suffered by Henry's first two queens was an atypical reproductive pattern, as even in an age of high child mortality, most women carried their pregnancies to term, and their infants lived at least sufficiently long to be christened.<sup>191</sup>

All miscarriages were assumed to be the fault of the woman, even though there is clearly a pattern of loss where Henry VIII is the variable in common.<sup>192</sup>

The birth of a healthy, live child was always cause for celebration in the sixteenth century, and the birth of a son even more so. When Catherine of Aragon gave birth to Henry, Duke of Cornwall, after delivering a stillborn daughter the previous year the entire city of London celebrated the birth of their future monarch,

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<sup>191</sup> Catrina Whitley, "A New Explanation For The Reproductive Woes and Midlife Decline Of Henry VIII," *The Historical Journal*, no 53 (2010): 12.

<sup>192</sup> Whitley, "Reproductive," 12.

And on Newyeres day, the first of January, the Quene was delieured of a Prince to the great gladnes of the realme, for the honour of whom, fyers were made, and diuers vessels with wyne, set for suche as woulde take theof in certayne streates in London, and generall processions thereupon to laude God.<sup>193</sup>

Henry was clear that his marriage to Anne was in hopes of securing a legitimate male heir and so when Anne gave birth to Elizabeth on September 10, 1533, he was openly disappointed at the gender of his newborn child.<sup>194</sup>

Henry's penultimate goal was to father a son and heir and it is with that intention that he continuously remarried. As king his desire to sire a legitimate male heir was paramount and it is with that knowledge that we view speculations on what would be confirmed as Jane Seymour's pregnancy with her son, Edward,

Omitted to write to the King that this Queen is thought to be with child, which would be a very great joy to this King, who, it seems, believes it, and intends, if it be found true, to have her crowned at Whitsuntide. Already all the embroiderers that can be got are employed making furniture and tapestry, the copes and ornaments taken from the churches not being spared. Moreover, the young lords and gentlemen of this Court are practising daily for the jousts and tournaments to be then made."<sup>195</sup>

Fortunately for Henry, Jane Seymour gave birth on October 12, 1537 to a son, Prince Edward.<sup>196</sup>

Speculation over Henry's fifth wife, Catherine Howard, and her status being with child or not existed throughout her tenure as Queen and with speculation that she was

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<sup>193</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 516.

<sup>194</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 26.

<sup>195</sup> "Henry VIII: April 1541, 1-10," in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Volume 16, 1540-1541, ed. James Gairdner and R H Brodie (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1898), 331-339, British History Online, accessed March 8, 2021, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol16/pp331-339>.

<sup>196</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 33.

pregnant came rewards and increased political status. Speculation such as, “The new Queen Katharine is said for certain to be pregnant.”<sup>197</sup> continued until her separation with Henry directly preceding her execution.

#### What Happened to Mother in between Birth and Churching?

A month after the birth of a child the mother was able to rejoin society after participating in a “churching” ceremony that marked her as being healed from childbirth. When a son was born it was asked that the mother “think upon ‘the Blessing the Family hath received, and especially when an Heir is born.’”<sup>198</sup> After Catherine had her first son, Henry of Cornwall, she was able to rejoin the court again with it being recorded that, “The Quene being Churched or purified, the kyng and she remoued from Rychemonde to Westminster, where was preparacion for a solempne Iustes in the honor of the Quene, the kyng being one, and with him thre aydes.”<sup>199</sup>

Religion held an important place in Tudor life and a newborn child’s first glimpse into the new religious world, was baptism. The Catholic faith had two separate baptism ceremonies for infants, marking the difference in genders from birth whereas the newly formed Anglican church shared a baptism ceremony for both genders signifying the genderless soul and making small steps towards gender equality.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> "Venice: September 1540," in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 5, 1534-1554, ed. Rawdon Brown (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1873), 87-88, British History Online, accessed March 8, 2021, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol5/pp87-88>.

<sup>198</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 5.

<sup>199</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 517.

<sup>200</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 5.

The loss of a child is always devastating, even in a time where one third of children died before reaching the age of fifteen.<sup>201</sup> Catherine of Aragon lost several children, and the loss of her infant son Henry, Duke of Cornwall in February of 1511 was remarked upon as a “sorrowfull chaunce”. His death was described as “depart(ing) this world at Rychemonde, and from thense was caryed to Westmynster and buried.”<sup>202</sup> Henry and Catherine of Aragon coped with the death differently, demonstrating the differences in parental feelings of the era with Hall’s Chronicle recording that,

The kyng lyke a wyse prynce, toke this dolorous chaunce wonderous wisely and the more to comfort the Quene, he dismissuled the matter, and made no great mourning outwardely: but the Quene lyke a natural woman, made much lamentation, how be it, by the kynges good persuasion and behauour her sorowe was mitigated but not shortly.<sup>203</sup>

### Mothers’ Death

Henry’s favorite wife, Jane Seymour, passed away from puerperal fever, more commonly known as child bed fever, twelve days after Edward’s death. Thomas Cromwell attributed her death “to 'the neglect of those about her who suffered her to take great cold and eat such things as her fantasy in sickness called for.”<sup>204</sup> Jane’s death did serve Cromwell as he was able to spend the next two years re-shaping the royal

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<sup>201</sup> H. Newton, “The Dying Child in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Pediatrics*, 136, no. 2 (2015): 218-20, doi: 10.1542/peds.2015-0971.

<sup>202</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 519.

<sup>203</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 519.

<sup>204</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 33.

households and reducing the size of future Queen's households.<sup>205</sup> It is his limiting which led to Anne of Cleve's ladies being returned to their homeland and which prevented Mary Lassell's from gaining a spot in Catherine Howard's courts.

After the death of Henry VIII, Catherine Parr married Thomas Seymour, Jane Seymour's brother and uncle to the current King Edward VI. Catherine and Thomas Seymour became pregnant, and complications from childbirth led to Catherine's death.<sup>206</sup>

### Raising Children

A mother's goal was to produce children that would raise their families' social status and increase the families' fortunes while furthering the dynasty that had already been created. Sending your daughter to court was oftentimes a way to achieve this goal as she would learn the skills necessary to integrate successfully into society as well as having the opportunity to serve the crown. Various points throughout Henry's reign led to more religiously minded mothers to be wary of sending their daughters to Henry's court and instead would aim to send their daughter to Princess Mary's court where there was an emphasis on religion and traditional morals. Additionally, Mary was known to be a Catholic, leading those favoring the old church to be more inclined to send their children there. With the introduction of Catherine Parr as Henry VIII's wife his court returned to a place of morality and religious piety and mothers were more apt to send their daughters to serve in her court.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 33.

<sup>206</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 48.

<sup>207</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 175.

## Wardships

It was not uncommon for wives and widows to take in wards, children of other members of the nobility whom they would raise in their household. This practice was important for strengthening patronage networks as it integrated families outside of the practice of intermarriage and strengthened family ties when done intergenerationally. These wardships generally proved to be mutually beneficial, even when they did not directly result in a union such as in the case of Elizabeth Cornwallis, “on one occasion, Margaret, the fourth duke's wife, specifically asked Anne Cornwallis, whose husband was a client of Norfolk's, to send her daughter Elizabeth to stay with her. Subsequently, the duke offered to host Elizabeth's wedding at Kenninghall.”<sup>208</sup> The bonds that were formed during wardships had a long-lasting impact on the ward and those overseeing the wards care, making this an incredibly intentional and strategic decision. Harris writes that “when members of the upper classes placed their children in the homes of their kinfolk, friends, and patrons, they were consciously doing so to strengthen their own networks and to perpetuate them into the next generation.”<sup>209</sup>

The intentionality of the practice of wardship led some to engage in it as a way to form and maintain lifetime social and political bonds. At its core the practice of wardship was based on the idea of relinquishing daily parenting duties to another who would take them over and serve as an authoritarian figure in that child's life. Some engaged in this practice consistently, such as in the below example,

Of all the noblewomen in the early Tudor period, Henry VII's mother, Margaret Beaufort, countess of Richmond, undoubtedly raised the most children of high

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<sup>208</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 263.

<sup>209</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 264.

birth. Because of her enormous influence with the king, a connection with her was particularly valuable. In addition, Henry frequently entrusted her with the actual rearing of his most important wards. Three of Edward IV's unmarried daughters; Edward, third duke of Buckingham, and his brother Henry; two of the third earl of Northumberland's children; Ralph, fourth earl of Westmorland; the countess's stepson, James Stanley, future bishop of Ely; the son and two grand-daughters of her half-brother, Sir John St. John; Nicholas Vaux, later created Lord Vaux of Harrowden, and two other future bishops, Hugh Oldham and William Smyth, all spent time in her care. What distinguished Lady Margaret from other noblewomen was that she brought up so many boys and young men.”<sup>210</sup>

Lady Margaret used the influence she gained from wardship throughout her life to her and her families benefit, but she was not alone in this. To gain and maintain a relationship with the Tudors was something one aimed for and success in this domain could be life changing.

### Education

A mother's domain was the nursery, and she was almost entirely in control over their upbringing. The arrival of Catherine of Aragon from Spain brought about a change in the expectations of a woman's education as well as the role of educated women as her interest in humanism influenced court and society as a whole.<sup>211</sup> Catherine's personal preference towards education and her necessitation of her daughter Mary to be well educated led Vives to pen a work regarding the education of daughters. Mary's education was to be as Catherine's was in the sense that it was training to become the spouse of a monarch, who would influence the rule of law for the land. Isabella had ensured that her daughter, Catherine, was well educated and prepared to become a Catholic monarch and

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<sup>210</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 264.

<sup>211</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 14.



Catherine did the same for her daughter.<sup>212</sup> The education Isabella gifted Catherine led to her being the best educated of Henry's six wives, however all six worked to serve and educate Henry's children.<sup>213</sup> Catherine's advanced education began as a child when she was extensively educated under her mother, Isabel's, watchful eye alongside her four surviving siblings. Alessandro Geraldino, one of Catherine's tutors and her confessor who accompanied her to England for her wedding to Prince Arthur, "wrote *De eruditione nobelium puellarum* (*On the Education of Noble Girls*, 1501), at Isabel's request."<sup>214</sup> Catherine's in dept education emphasized literacy and the studying of academic works, a trend she encouraged in the education of her daughter.

She would have read, or known of, works that dealt with the education of women such as Juan Rodriguez de la Camara's *El triunfo de las donas* (*The Triumph of Women*, 1443), Alvaro de Luna's *El libro de las virtuosas y claras mugeres* (*The Book of Virtuous and Famous Women*, 1446), Fray Martín Alonso de Córdoba's *Jardín de la nobles doncellas* (*The Garden of Noble Maidens*, 1468), and Francesc Eiximenis's manual for female instruction, the *Carro de las donas* (*The Carriage of Women*, 15th century), that may have been brought to court by Beatriz Galindo<sup>30</sup>. It is also likely that she read or knew of Juan de Flores's *Grisel and Mirabella*, *The Slander against Women*, and *The Defense of Ladies against Slanderers*, works in the *querelle des femmes* genre that were dedicated to an unnamed female reader who may well have been Isabel.<sup>215</sup>

Catherine's rigorous academic education was not an accident- her mother carefully curated her and her sisters' educations. They were raised by an independent, powerful Queen to become powerful queens in their own right. Catherine carried the

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<sup>212</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 14.

<sup>213</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 15.

<sup>214</sup> Earenfight, "Raising Infanta," 424.

<sup>215</sup> Earenfight, "Raising Infanta," 424.

tradition on to her daughter as well setting a trend for well-educated women on the English throne.

Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife and the reason behind the Anglican Reformation, supported humanist scholars and writers and kept "illicit books."<sup>216</sup>

Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour, died shortly after giving birth to the future King Edward VI but came from a family that valued education as shown by, "three of her nieces jointly produced the *Hecatodistichon*, a series of Latin distichs written to commemorate the death of the Catholic Marguerite de Navarre, finding in the French queen a progenitor of reformist sympathies."<sup>217</sup>

Catherine Parr, Henry's sixth and final wife, was incredibly well educated and is recognized with supervising the education of Elizabeth and pressing the importance of a good education on Edward. Catherine was educated in a similar manner as princess Mary, as they were only three years apart in age, however she did not keep her Catholic tendencies and instead followed the new evangelical teachings.<sup>218</sup> Catherine ensured that Edward was well educated, and that education influenced Elizabeth. Additionally, Catherine's passion for education impacted her court and the court as a whole, as those wishing to serve her were expected to have a scholarly background in order to contribute to the conversation. Catherine surrounded herself with learned women, but as her ladies in waiting and in the women that served them.<sup>219</sup> Catherine was also known to educate

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<sup>216</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 15.

<sup>217</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 15.

<sup>218</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 15.

<sup>219</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 16.

the young women of her household, including the Lady Jane Grey at age nine who continued to serve the then Queen until her death in the fall of 1548, finishing her duties to her beloved Catherine by serving in her funeral as a chief mourner.<sup>220</sup>

Catherine Brandon (Willoughby), Duchess of Suffolk, was influenced greatly by the Catherine Parr's intellectual pursuits which led to her own career.<sup>221</sup>

Mary Tudor, Henry's sister and the former Queen of France and her husband Charles Brandon made sure to carefully educate their children. Mary had a sizeable library and was able to continue her study of Latin. Her son, Henry, Early of Lincoln, was provided with an exceptional French tutor Pierre Valence and was well educated. Her daughter, Frances Brandon, was called a "a most studyous and virtuous yonge mayde" by Richard Hyrde at seven years old in the "1524 the Introduction to Margaret Roper's translation of Erasmus's Treatise on the Lord's Prayer".<sup>222</sup> In his introduction he upholds the female education of the classic languages saying, "The Latin and the Greek tongue I see not but there is as little hurt in them as in books of English and French.... And also can bear well enough, that women read them, if they will, never so much."<sup>223</sup>

Religion was an acceptable thing for women to study in the early modern period in England, which necessitated the knowledge of Latin, Hebrew, and Greek in order to translate and understand early religious texts.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 176.

<sup>221</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 16.

<sup>222</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 173.

<sup>223</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 173.

<sup>224</sup> Gardiner, *English Girlhood*, 173.

## Raising Boys vs. Girls

Male and female children led incredibly dissimilar lives after the age of seven when sons would exit the nursery and there was a strong favoring towards males. Due to the system of primogeniture where the firstborn son would inherit there was an obvious preference towards one's sons, particularly the eldest son. Their roles in society and their families were incredibly different as was their upbringings as evidenced by their level of education and the skills they were taught. In a society that came to value education, there was concern when educating daughters with Mazzola writing that, "Educating other daughters presented similar risks, for reading might threaten a girl's chastity, give her airs, or render her less pliable in the hands of her parents or husband."<sup>225</sup>

There were a multitude of gender disparities but literary sources report that "Girls were as exposed to physical danger in childhood as boys," through a myriad of accidental injuries generally occurring due to a lack of supervision.<sup>226</sup> Some parents did value the lives of their sons more than their daughters, as in the case of Lady Ann Fanshawe who, when her family was stricken with smallpox, "abandoned her daughters in order to devote all her energies to 'tending my dear son'. She lamented the fact that he had died while his sisters survived."<sup>227</sup> That isn't to say when a female child died there was not mourning, nor is it to say that a daughter's life did not matter. The Countess of Denbigh

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<sup>225</sup> Mazzola, "Schooling Shrews and Grooming Queens in the Tudor Classroom," 3.

<sup>226</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 8.

<sup>227</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 8.

nursed her sick granddaughter until her eventual death and said, “if she had been the daughter of a King she could not have had no more care taken of her.”<sup>228</sup>

### Illegitimate Offspring

Illegitimate children born out of wedlock, often called bastards, were a part of Tudor life. Generally speaking, illegitimate children stayed with their mothers until around the age of seven at which time their fathers would enter them into service.<sup>229</sup>

Henry VIII had acknowledged the birth of his son Henry FitzRoy by his mistress Elizabeth Blount in spring of 1519. Better known as Bessie Blount, she entered Catherine of Aragon’s household as a maid of honor as a young woman, growing in importance in Catherine’s household as the years went on. By 1514 it was noted Bessie was featuring prominently in court dances and entertainments” but it isn’t until fall of 1518 that Henry is “in the chains of love with her.”<sup>230</sup> Bessie was married to Gilbert Tailboys in 1522 and was given the manor of Rokeby, property in Yorkshire, and allowed to return to court where she led an unremarkable life as the mother to six more children with her husband Gilbert. Her son Henry was raised at court and given “every mark of royal favour, being created Duke of Richmond and Somerset in 1525 and allotted so splendid a household that Queen Catherine was moved to protest at the implicit insult to Princess Mary.”<sup>231</sup> Until this time Catherine of Aragon had largely ignored Henry’s infidelities and her

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<sup>228</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 8.

<sup>229</sup> Mendelson, *Women in Early Modern England*, 9.

<sup>230</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 17.

<sup>231</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 17.

reaction to Henry FitzRoy's appointments led to Henry VIII dismissing three of her Spanish maids of honor. Catherine was, "in the sardonic words of the Venetian ambassador," "The Queen was obliged to submit and have patience."<sup>232</sup> Catherine's legitimate daughter won out in the end, as she was crowned sovereign of England in 1553.

### Fashioning Dynasties

A mother's role was not just to produce a dynasty, but to shape it through their children's legacies. Women took their patronage networks incredibly serious as these connections were used to make future matches for their children resulting in alliances between various members of the nobility. Anne Somerset writes that,

The women most likely to arrange their children's marriages were widows who had replaced their husbands as head of the household. Dame Katherine Blount, Margaret, marchioness of Dorset, Margaret Le Strange, Lady Maud Parr, Anne Rede, Margaret, countess of Salisbury, and Jane, countess of Southampton were all widowed mothers who arranged their children's marriages. Women in second marriages also often assumed responsibility for finding mates for their children by previous husbands.<sup>233</sup>

These women's responsibilities were notable as the marriages that they formed for their children would influence future dynastic potential and matches. Additionally, these matches had financial implications, such as doweries and in some cases the financial upkeep of sons as seen in the below case.

When they negotiated matches for their offspring, upper-class women often proved to be tough bargainers. The marchioness of Dorset demanded, for example, that the duke of Suffolk pay all the costs of supporting her minor son after he married Suffolk's daughter. Sir Giles Greville became so exasperated at

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<sup>232</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 17.

<sup>233</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 261.

the guarantees Anne Rede sought for her daughter's jointure land that he threatened to break off the discussions altogether.<sup>234</sup>

As seen above, mothers fiercely fought for their children's futures, both publicly and behind the scenes. Ensuring the future generations would be financially provided for and able to support themselves and future generations with the pinnacle aim of consistently upward social mobility.

Mothers would go to any ends to meet their goals, including ending marriage negotiations prematurely when not receiving what they required or what was requested, such as in the case of Lady Maud Parr and Lord Scrope, as seen below.

In July 1523, Lady Maud Parr wrote to Thomas Lord Dacre, who was acting as an intermediary in the negotiations for a marriage between her daughter Katherine and his grandson Henry, Lord Scrope's heir, to complain that Scrope would not agree to the terms previously worked out with his counsel. Dacre, who strongly supported the match, wrote to Scrope advising him to accept the original terms, which he said were both reasonable and compatible with 'the common course of marriage'. Praising Lady Parr for both her good birth and wisdom, he advised his son-in-law that he should let her raise Henry until he reached the age of consent if the marriage took place. 'For I assure you, he might learn with her as well as in any place that I know, as well nurture as French and other languages...' When Scrope refused to increase his offer or reduce his demands, Lady Parr rejected the match.<sup>235</sup>

Lady Parr's refusal of Henry after contract negotiations through a third party, Lord Dacre, was standard for the era as was her level of involvement as a mother. She selected a party who had personal interest in overseeing the match, as Henry was Lord Dacre's grandson, and went directly to him with her concerns. Dacre supported the match as well, but more so he took Lady Parr's concerns to heart and worked to find a solution that upheld agreements made on his family's behalf and would best benefit his grandson and

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<sup>234</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 261.

<sup>235</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 262.

his potential granddaughter in law. In doing so, Lord Dacre went a step further offering up the idea of wardship and suggested Lady Parr's home as a place of exceptional learning and praising the education she was providing to her daughter, emphasizing the importance of female education during this time. Lord Dacre's high opinion of Lady Parr and her daughter did not result in Lord Scrope agreeing to his original terms and upholding the terms that were agreed upon leading to Lady Parr's dissolution of the pairing. Selecting potential suitors and overseeing the courting, betrothal and matrimonial process were considered to be typically motherly duties, and it was within one's rights to end contract negotiations at any time. Lady Parr's refusal without mention of a male authority figure showcases the important role that women held during this time.

Women of this area had to survive in any means possible, and due to that their marriage choices weren't always in the modern era would describe as conventional. In that vein, it was not unusual for widows to remarry and their child to marry the child of their new spouses, as described in Barbara Harris' is work, "In a society where widows with children often married men with offspring by a previous wife, marriages between step-brothers and step-sisters were fairly common."<sup>236</sup>

Although unconventional by today's standards, such dynastic matches proved to be beneficial to the families they served.

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<sup>236</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 261.



## Chapter V.

### Women Shaped Court

Female members of Royal households held an integral role, and the sense that they worked hard to form and maintain kinsman relationships. In doing so, their male counterparts were typically aware of their hard work and sought to praise them for their efforts, and in doing so masculinized the women as to not create a conflicting schema. During this era, men had a difficult time understanding or at least accepting the fluidity of gender roles seen particularly in the nobility as recorded by Harris,

As we have seen, upper-class men accepted the political activity of their wives, sisters, and daughters and even praised their successes. Nonetheless, the language they used to compliment them ought to caution us against exaggerating the flexibility of gender boundaries in the period. Men praised effective women by saying they acted like men, language that simultaneously labeled them as atypical and reaffirmed the masculinity of the political realm. That equation, never challenged in this period, helps to explain why women's political activity neither threatened, nor stimulated debate about, the male monopoly of formal political institutions.<sup>237</sup>

Women formed and maintained the connections that rule their lives through a system of visiting, courtly encounters, gift giving, and wardship systems and through these methods they remained in near constant contact with each other. "Household accounts show that members of the nobility and gentry visited each other constantly. Upper-class women were rarely as isolated as we tend to think, even when they lived in outlying areas of the country."<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 281.

<sup>238</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 264.

Courtly encounters were not exclusively for those who served in the Queen's court, instead London became a place of socialization which allowed for female members of the nobility and the upper echelons to form and maintain relationships with each other.

The court was also an important focus of upper-class social life. Some upper-class women held appointments in the queen's household, but even those who did not certainly visited the court from time to time, and enjoyed the opportunities for socializing that London and its environs provided.<sup>239</sup>

Women who were members of the Queens court rolled and oversaw every aspect of her daily life, as well as state events, and visitors of the court were also able to, when invited, join the Queen in her daily life. Lesser members of the nobility participated of similar daily activities, such as dressing, dining, overseeing childcare, the feminine arts, and overseeing a household and typically one would do those while socializing, whether it be with family, wards, once ladies, or visitors. The time spent engaging in daily tasks tended to have ulterior motives, meaning that, "some of what appears to be casual socializing clearly had political significance."<sup>240</sup>

Gift giving was an important way to form and maintain relationships whether near or far and was also used as a way to showcase one's importance and value to others. In doing so, one was publicly declaring their alliance or intent to gain favor with an object of financial or sentimental value, "The constant exchange of gifts, one of the most striking features of elite social life, also had political implications: in addition to

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<sup>239</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 265.

<sup>240</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 265.

sustaining kin and patronage networks in a general way, it gave donors and recipients a specific claim on each other's resources and assistance."<sup>241</sup>

One, during the Tudor era, did not give gifts without the expectation of something in return. Most interactions in this culture were transactional in nature. The guarantees received in return for a gift of financial value or sentimental value could be the promise of a future favor, or the gift of an alliance as seen in the case of Lady Lisle,

Eleanor, countess of Rutland, responded to one of Lady Lisle's many gifts with the promise 'if there by any pleasure that my lord or I can do for your ladyship here or elsewhere, ye shall have the same... Similarly, Thomas Culpepper offered to do her 'any service or pleasure that in me shall lie' in appreciation for the gift of some hawks. William Coffin, a gentleman of the privy chamber, thanked Lady Lisle for his hawk with the promise he would always do his 'utmost' for her.<sup>242</sup>

It is important to remember that gift giving was not always done through items of monetary value, often sentimental and symbolic objects were given, called tokens. The exchange of tokens underscored the symbolic meaning of gift-giving. A token was a personal belonging or treasured possession, such as a favourite piece of jewellery, particularly associated with its owner. It was important not for its intrinsic value, but because it expressed the owner's special relationship with the recipient. The fact that the recipient was ultimately expected to return the token further emphasized its symbolic, as opposed to its material, significance.<sup>243</sup>

Gift giving to members of the opposite sex was to be expected, and not at all considered to be uncommon during this era, however those gifts were almost exclusively monetary, outside of familial ties. Tokens, on the other hand, were often only given to those that one shared an intimate and close-knit relationship with. To give a token to a man outside of familial lines could be considered scandalous and as such one had to take precaution such as in the below case,

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<sup>241</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 265.

<sup>242</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 266.

<sup>243</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 266.

The only man Lady Lisle gave a token to was Thomas Culpepper, who sent her a ring and specifically asked her for some bracelets in return. Because tokens carried the suggestion of personal intimacy, Lady Lisle complied somewhat self-consciously, explicitly noting, "They be the first that ever I sent to any man."<sup>244</sup>

Lady Lisle, prolific gift giver, and it is noted that she had never given a man a token before Thomas Culpepper. This emphasizes the remarkably rare nature of such an occurrence and seems to imply that women of this era were expected to give and receive gifts, and promises of alliances or future favors, however they were expected to remain above even whispers of impropriety or intimacy of a man. This is further emphasized by Lady Lisle's gift giving tendencies with members of the opposite sex at court. She clearly was not opposed to gift giving, as she gave so many so frequently, generally by way of consumables. Her gift giving was not done necessarily from a generous and selfless perspective, instead she gained notable alliances and benefits from this, such as seen below.

Lady Lisle did, of course, have other male friends at court, but she gave them gifts rather than tokens. For example, she sent Thomas Cromwell provisions, such as cheese, wild fowl, deer, and dotterels; and Sir William Fitzwilliam, treasurer of the king's household, French wine. Lady Lisle was especially attentive to the earl of Sussex, her niece Mary's husband and a prominent courtier, when she was trying to place her two elder daughters at court in 1536 and 1537. In May 1537, John Husee, her agent in London, advised Lady Lisle to send the earl both French and Gascon wine.' A few months later he reported with satisfaction that Sussex had received the wine 'wondrous thankfully'. In November, Lady Lisle promised Sussex and his wife another shipment before Christmas. As Lady Lisle hoped, the earl and countess were instrumental in securing her daughter Anne's appointment as a maid-in- waiting to the queen.<sup>245</sup>

Lady Lisle was obviously benefiting from her generous endeavors, as was her family. She represents the type of ideal woman of this time in the sense that she managed

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<sup>244</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 266.

<sup>245</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 266.

her domestic sphere impeccably and also made important political and social connections. Lady Lyle worked inside and outside of traditionally domestic spheres, in order to achieve her means, and this case placing her daughters in advantageous positions at court.

It was not just active gift giving, but rather the type of gift given that had an importance. Outside of intimate items such as tokens, consumables varied in value, with bucks having considerable value. Those members of the landed Gentry, or the landholding nobility, held property on which they could hunt, a privilege not granted to those of lesser stature add to animals that were to be hunted instead of raised holding a higher value. As these animals had a higher value, giving them as gifts held more political and influential weight than giving smaller items of a lesser value, conversely not receiving one when your neighboring Lords did was a larger slight as seen in the case of East Anglican nobility,

Deer occupied a special place in the pattern of upper-class gift-giving. Members of the elite attached so much importance to presents of bucks and does that they gave them to friends and relatives who had ample deer parks of their own. For this reason, Diarmaid MacCullough has suggested that such gifts carried particular political significance. He notes, for example, that the third duke of Norfolk regularly gave deer to members of the ruling elite in East Anglia with the pointed exception of the duke of Suffolk, his rival for pre-eminence in the region.<sup>246</sup>

The nobility at this time was a strictly hierarchical system in which each tier blatantly aware of their rank based on where they sat in the English peerage system. When one was able to fight for a higher social stature, one did, and this was not always achieved through direct means such as warfare or marriage, instead sly social maneuvers

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<sup>246</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 267.

such as this could be made in attempt of achieving at least the appearance of social mobility.

As gifts were viewed as largely transactional in nature it should not come as a shock that they, at times, were sent with accompanying requests. This request could come in the form of an object of value, a consumable good, an animal, or an offer whether it be for usage of land or an asset, a visit, or a position such as in the below cases,

In December 1534, Thomas Culpepper sent a buck to Lady Lisle with a request for a spaniel from Calais; at the time spaniels were very much in vogue as pets at court. In June 1552, Katherine, Duchess of Suffolk, sent William Cecil a buck he had asked for with an open invitation to hunt with whomever he chose in her park at Grimsthorpe. Her offer reflected their warm personal relationship and active political alliance.<sup>247</sup>

As demonstrated above, the primary gift givers at this time were women who used the domestic sphere to form and maintain important relationships. Women of this era achieved power in ways different than men, and yet they still held it. In the case of the Duchess of Suffolk her offer to not only used her lands, but to do so with anyone of William Cecil's choosing, was demonstrative of her level of trust in him. In a tumultuous era where the wrong political alliance could literally lead you penniless, or if you were particularly unlucky, headless, her confidence in Cecil to only allow those she could form alliance with, or who shared her values and goals with to some extent is remarkable.

The transactional nature of gift giving was in essence the act of buying favor and was used as a tool by members of the elite for their own personal gain. As such, gifts were not often given to those of lower rank, were those who had nothing to give or at least that the gift giver wished to receive as seen in this instance,

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<sup>247</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 266.

Because members of the upper classes gave each other gifts in the expectation they would receive commensurate presents or favours in return, they did not distribute them indiscriminately, even within the relatively restricted circle of the nobility and upper gentry. By and large, they gave gifts to friends and relatives of equal or greater status and power. In exchanges between women of unequal status, the woman of higher rank or greater influence reciprocated by extending her goodwill, hospitality, and patronage. Thus, Eleanor, countess of Rutland, one of Jane Seymour's ladies-in-waiting, sent New Year's presents to Katherine, countess of Devonshire; Margaret, marchioness of Dorset; Agnes, the old, and Elizabeth, the young, duchesses of Norfolk; and Gertrude, marchioness of Exeter, a very select group among the highest ranking noblewomen. But, on the other hand, there is no evidence she gave anything to Lady Markham (wife of Sir John), who sent a present when her daughter Katherine was born and regularly supplied her household with fresh fruit and other provisions. Similarly, Lady Lisle frequently sent the countess tokens and gifts; in return, the countess used her influence on behalf of Lady Lisle's daughters and eventually took Katherine into her own household.<sup>248</sup>

As seen above, the giving of gifts was not only transactional but also a sign of one's alliances and patronage. In the case of King Henry VIII, the gifts he provided tended to be more lavish in nature than consumable goods, and their value directly related to the value he placed upon those he gifted the objects,

Lists of the king's New Year's gifts provide further evidence about upper-class women's ties to the court; those for 1528, 1532, 1533, 1534, and 1539 contain the names of ninety-one different women. In addition, Henry granted annuities, land, or other favours to sixty-nine upper-class women during his reign; since only fourteen of them appeared on the New Year's lists, they represent another group of upper-class women with access to royal patronage.<sup>249</sup>

As seen above gifts were freely given, but the repeated gifting and the value of gift distinguished those in favor from those who achieved patronage from the crown. The number of female members of the court that received gifts during Henry's reign is of note, as is the idea of female patronage networks as discussed by Harris below,

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<sup>248</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 266.

<sup>249</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 271.

As one might expect given their family connections and proximity to the throne, a high proportion of the women who received New Year's gifts, grants or other presents from the king were ladies of the court. During Henry VIII's reign, sixty-four or 52.8 per cent of the one hundred twenty-one court ladies I have identified appeared on at least one of the five extant New Year's lists or received other grants or gifts from the king. To determine, however, whether, and to what degree, women at court were able to exercise independent influence on politics or the distribution of patronage is a more difficult problem. Only three court ladies can be unequivocally credited with doing so during the early Tudor period: Margaret Beaufort, countess of Richmond (Henry VII's mother), Anne Boleyn, and Catherine, duchess of Suffolk.<sup>250</sup>

It is notable that Henry's second and sixth wife are credited with having their own patronage networks, and as such holding their own political influence. Patronage networks such as these were used not just to ask for favors such as those seen above, like a material good or court appointment but also for larger issues including those political and financial in nature,

Women frequently drew on these connections in petitions to the king and his leading ministers. Fifty-six different noble women wrote letters containing suits to Wolsey or Cromwell. Their requests covered a wide variety of topics. Some were routine petitions for a relative or servant involved in a lawsuit or seeking patronage from the crown. In other cases, wives in failed marriages asked for help in securing support from their estranged husbands; mothers petitioned for custody of their children or tried to place them at court.<sup>251</sup>

These patronage networks all ultimately led back to Henry VIII unique, and in a larger sense, the crown which was at this time the source of all power. Families aimed for consistently upward social mobility and at the top was the crown. That said, patronage networks went two ways- gift giving and asking for favors was quite common, but those patrons had to ensure their dependents remained loyal and that they had their continued support and to do so they had to form and maintain their own connection with the crown,

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<sup>250</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 275.

<sup>251</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 271.



As examples cited throughout this paper have made clear, the patronage networks and regional political power of the early Tudor elite ultimately depended on the central government. The gradual consolidation of the monarchy forced the nobility and gentry to turn to the crown for the economic and political resources necessary to sustain their positions. Their prosperity, power, and prestige depended on their success in securing offices, grants, pensions, wardships, and privileges for themselves and their dependents.<sup>252</sup>

Catherine Parr was a prolific patron, particularly of the arts, but did so for political purposes similar to the above examples,

As patron and subject, Kateryn Parr's commitment to supporting English artists like John Bettes and John Hayes, as well as those from the continent like Giles Gering, Nicolo Bellini, Hans Holbein, Susanna Horenbout, Margaret Holsewyther and Lievine Teerlinc has been well established, as has the fact that the last three mentioned miniaturists were all members of her own chamber. Kateryn's monopoly in 1545 on at least one court painter, possibly William Scrots, led an exasperated Thomas Hussey to write to the Earl of Surrey in November, that "yowre [pi]kt[ur] be nothyng in redinesse for that hys delegens ys ssiche wt [the Quene's] grace". For Parr this robust encouragement of portraiture certainly had an element of artistic engagement ("I have sent in haste to the painters for one of my little pictures which is very perfect by the judgement of as many as hath seen [it]") But as queen, Parr employed her patronage primarily as a political tool to reinforce her royal position at court.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 271.

<sup>253</sup> James, "Reputation," 8.

Prince of Wales attributed to William Scrots, as well as the portraits of Kateryn's stepdaughters Mary and Elizabeth, painted individually in oils for the first time. These works had a higher purpose than simply painted likenesses of important royals. The portraits of Henry's daughters were reminders of their return to the official line of succession, and at a time when the king's health was a matter of concern Edward's portrait reinforced his position as primary royal heir ensuring the stability and continuity of the Tudor dynasty.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> James, "Reputation," 8.

<sup>255</sup> James, "Reputation," 9.

footing as her royal husband was a bold move. The painting is of an impressive size, measuring 71 by 37 inches, underscoring the audaciousness of the project. Not only does (this portrait) present the queen in all her splendor, wearing an emblem of royal regalia in her crown brooch, it also presents her on a “turkey carpet” which had until recently been reserved to paintings of the Virgin Mary.<sup>256</sup>

Catherine’s portrait as Queen was filled with symbolism, and showcased her value not only as a patroness, but also as a political figure. The use of a full-length portrait for a woman was unique to Catherine at this time and as suggested by James demonstrated her viewing herself as an equal to her husband. She also exhibited her royal status through her clothing and the background of the portrait, wearing a brooch that signified her royal status. Additionally, Catherine was standing on a turkey carpet, an object that was traditionally only used in depictions of the Virgin Mary emphasizing her status as a religious figure in her own right.

## Religion

The various wives of Henry VIII had an impact on the theology common at court, and therefore theology throughout England.

Following the formation of the Anglican Church the question arose on the acceptance of orthodoxy, something Henry officially supported as of the 1539 Act of Six Articles.<sup>257</sup>

Catherine Parr was a scholar and a theologian in her own right and surrounded herself with a court of women who shared her beliefs and enthusiasm for theological debate and conversation. Catherine was undoubtedly of the Protestant persuasion, and her

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<sup>256</sup> James, “Reputation,” 14.

<sup>257</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 43.

and her ladies listened to sermons and readings by authors and preachers that were not endeared by the Crown including Bishop Latimer.<sup>258</sup> Henry had grown fond of theological discussion and debate since becoming the head of the Church of England and his marriage with Catherine Parr allowed him a companion to discuss his beliefs. At times these debates were good-spirited, but at others Catherine would upstage her husband in her learning or viewpoints leading to him becoming foul in word and mood. On such occasion occurred in the presence of Bishop Gardiner, after which Henry “remarked testily to the Bishop that at times he found his wife too opinionated,” something Gardiner leapt on saying that “that if any other of his subjects had entertained the religious views expressed by his wife they would have 'by law deserved death.”<sup>259</sup> The Bishop went on to tell Henry “that by thus nourishing heresy he was imperiling his own soul” leading to Henry authorizing action to be taken against Catherine. These proceedings were, for Catherine’s sake, slow enough that she was able to prepare herself and began with the questioning of Anne Askew, female theologian and scholar who was already a convicted heretic.<sup>260</sup> Anne was tortured for information regarding the Queen and remained silent, even when two of the King’s own investigators racked her when the Lieutenant of the Tower refused.<sup>261</sup>

In July of 1546 a royal decree stated that it was illegal to own or hold a translation of the Bible, leading Bishop Gardiner to believe that he had found his cause for her arrest.

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<sup>258</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 44.

<sup>259</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 44.

<sup>260</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 44.

<sup>261</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 45.

Fortunately for Catherine she was aware of his plans in advance and she went to her husband in hopes of regaining his affections. Once there Catherine asked,

to be guided by her husband in all matters of religion. 'Not so, by St Mary . . .,' the King returned sharply, 'you are to become a doctor, Kate, to instruct us (as we take it) and not to be instructed or directed by us.' Humbly Catherine beseeched him to believe that such was not the case and, lulled by this endearing display of wifely submissiveness, Henry relented. 'And is it even so sweetheart?' he cooed, ' . . . then perfect friends we are now again as ever at any time heretofore.'<sup>262</sup>

Catherine who invoked the belief that women were the weaker sex and needed guidance from their stronger, more intelligent husbands almost certainly saved her life as the next day when on a walk with her husband they were stopped by Chancellor Wriothsley who planned to arrest the Queen, on the King's orders. Henry, recently reconciled with his wife called the Chancellor an "arrant knave, beast and fool" and kept her under his protection until his death. Catherine worked to follow the King's political and religious views without changing his opinions.<sup>263</sup>

Women served an important role in integrating scholars into society, through personal interaction and financial support as well as by reading and discussing the literature and ideas they created. Members of the nobility would become patrons of various artists and academics, oftentimes housing and outfitting them and introducing them to others that might consider sponsoring them as well, as in the case of the Lady Pallas who,

presented thesaied persones, whom, she names her scholers, to the kynges highness, besechyng the same, to accept them as her scholers, who wer desirous to serue hym, to the encrease of their honors, which saied scholers had about them on foote, to the nombre of an hundred persones, freshly appareled in Veluettes of sundery coloures, with Hose and Bonettes, according to the same. And further,

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<sup>262</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 46.

<sup>263</sup> Somerset, *Ladies-in-waiting*, 46.

thesaid Ladie desired the king that it might please his grace, that her saied scholars, might be defundautes to al commers which request was granted.<sup>264</sup>

One's patronage to scholars, as well as others, was an important piece of one's life and the act of sharing patrons and touting their accolades could lead to additional successes for the patron in question. However, when one supported the wrong party whether it be a patron, a religious or political figure, or belief system it could have disastrous consequences.

A number of upper-class women openly opposed Henry's assumption of supremacy over the church as strongly as his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. The marchioness of Exeter, the countesses of Salisbury and Derby, Anne, Lady Hussey, Lady Mary Kingston, and Lady Jane Bellingham were all implicated in the affair of Elizabeth Barton, the Nun of Kent, in 1533. The danger of any connexion to Barton was soon apparent. After Henry VIII forgave the marchioness of Exeter for her involvement, she obsequiously wrote, ' I shall now most humbly prostrate [myself] at the feet of your royal majesty.' In excusing herself, she asked the king 'first and chiefly to consider that I am a woman, whose frailty and brittleness is such as most facilely, easily, and lightly is seduced and brought unto abuse and light belief.'<sup>265</sup>

The Marchioness of Exeter saved herself by using the excuse that she was a woman, something not uncommon during this era. By pleading feminine ideocracy and incompetence and requiring male assistance women were often times able to save themselves, and at times their families as well, and to have their indiscretions forgiven. The idea that women were inferior to men was prominent in this society however it could be used to one's benefit.

## Patronage

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<sup>264</sup> Hall, *Hall's Chronicle*, 509.

<sup>265</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 277.

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<sup>268</sup> James, "Reputation," 9.

<sup>269</sup> James, "Reputation," 14.



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### Intrigue and Politics

These women of the Tudor era were used by the men in their lives as political pawns and yet still played the political game independently of the men in their lives and experienced triumphs and defeats in the process.

Furthermore, the ladies of the court played a prominent role among the group of upper-class women involved in high politics on their own account in the 1530's and 1540's. Of the twenty-two women notable for their activity in this period and to be discussed in this article, fifteen - almost seventy per cent - were connected to the court. Situated as they were at the center of the maelstrom that merged personal, family, dynastic, and religious politics, they could not help being drawn into the factions, plots, and counterplots characteristic of court life in those decades.<sup>270</sup>

Courtly connections, patronage networks, and kinsman bonds were instrumental aspects of social mobility during this period. While women typically operated in a different sphere than their male counterparts, they still worked to achieve a common goal- betterment for themselves, and for their families

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<sup>270</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 276.

## Chapter VI.

### Conclusion and Issues for Further Research

Coming back to the question of power that started this research, this thesis has shown that Henry VIII's wives had influence not only on their households, but also on the three major institutions of power in British society that are commonly seen as a male-only affair: politics, religion, education. In this work I looked at power structures within the English nobility and sought to find where power was concentrated and how that power was acquired and kept, and what could lead to a loss of this power. Power in this sense is defined by influence, wealth, and property, and ranked within the English peerage system. I found that power was held primarily by the monarch, in this case Henry VIII, who could then give and take away power as desired. Gender was not relevant when discussing dependence or independence from the monarch as both genders depended on Henry VIII allowing them to hold power and both genders suffered when it was taken away. In a system of almost absolute rule by the monarch his lesser nobles had to rely on his, or those closest to him, for gifts and favors as well as the retention of their lands and property. Women typically used the domestic sphere to attain and share power and especially utilized patronage and kinship networks. These behind-the-scenes connections helped these women profoundly and allowed them to network and form and continue alliances privately. Patronage networks were also used for the benefit of those giving patronage as well as patrons. Additionally, women utilized their unique role in religious

structures to indirectly influence and directly affect real change particularly after the Henrican Reformation.

I reviewed primary and secondary source materials including letters, diaries, household accounts, church and state records, literature of the era, in addition to less traditional source materials such as architectural changes, noted changes in fashion, as well as art while researching this work.

In this work I have found that the wives of Henry VIII all held varying degrees of power, however all had a symbiotic or parasitic relationship with Henry VIII, however that relationship was not exclusively based on one's gender, everyone living in England at this time only had the power that Henry granted them. In a time where the idea of the divine right of kings was firmly entrenched in society to go against the King, even in the most minute of ways, was equivalent to treason. It isn't necessarily that women lacked power, but rather an indication of a systemic issue where one person controlled the distribution of power throughout the realm and as a result everyone in the political and social machine lacked independent power. Everyone within England during this time only had the power the crown allowed them, additionally any and all wealth and property held on English soil was subject to the crown. Displeasing the monarch in any way was almost a surefire way to diminish, if not lose, all assets and potentially one's life.

The matter of one's power increased during pregnancy as the pregnant woman could potentially be carrying a son, a male heir to continue the dynasty. No one took advantage of this quite like Anne Boleyn who threw severable notable tantrums during periods of suspected or confirmed pregnancy. The need for a child was so great for Henry VIII he would allow almost anything in order to get it, as was evidenced by his initial

divorce from Catherine of Aragon and marriage to Anne Boleyn and later her execution as well as Catherine Howards and his divorce from Anne of Cleves.

The wives of Henry VIII ultimately attained power independent of their spouse as a result of their efforts in the domestic, diplomatic, and religious spheres. Women certainly held a unique role during this time, and their duties as a daughter, wife, and mother all impacted their roles and expectations during the varying periods of their lives. Women controlled the domestic sphere at all levels: from the nursery, holding wardships, being the pawns in dynastic matches, becoming mothers and shaping and molding their own children to continually improve their dynasty. We see the trends that mothers implemented directly impacting their legacy, such as in the case of the education of Catherine of Aragon provided by her mother, Isabella of Castille, and the degree of education to which Catherine and Henry's surviving daughter, the future Mary I was educated.

Education was an incredibly important part of the Tudor Era, with literacy rates rising particularly for female members of the nobility as well as within the lower classes, "The evidence of literacy suggests that elementary education was flourishing in the decade after the break with Rome. The revolution of the 1530's, the royal coup over the Church and the dissolution of the monasteries, had no adverse effect on children learning to write."<sup>271</sup>

During a time when women assumed greater political power than that of their predecessors, as a result of the Henrican reformation and subsequent political unrest, the

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<sup>271</sup> David Cressy, "Levels of Illiteracy in England, 1530-1730," *The Historical Journal* 20, no. 1 (1977): 1-23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2638587>.

need for educated and literate women who could assume their spouses' responsibilities if needed, was paramount. Female literacy was the minimum, with Catherine of Aragon arguably being the best educated of Henry's wives and excelling at her education which consisted of,

Philosophy, literature, and religion, and music (she could play the clavichord and harp). She could speak French, English, and German in addition to Castilian and Latin, prompting Beatriz Galindo to note that Catalina surpassed her mother in Latin learning. She studied late medieval ideas on virtue, justice, and proper queenly behavior and Christianized versions of Classical philosophy and natural science concerning medical understandings of the differences between the sexes.<sup>272</sup>

The education she received under her mother's careful supervision emphasized the Catholic Church and Catholicism in general as well as patronage and courtly duty. These traits and this education benefitted Catherine throughout her life and in a larger sense, benefitted women throughout her courts, and that learning and knowledge did trickle down to some extent. Her exceptional education led to the normalization of exceptional education for female members of nobility such as what we see in the case of her daughter Mary, and her rival Anne's daughter Elizabeth.

In terms of which of Henry's wives held the most power independently of him, it is my belief that Catherine of Aragon holds that title. Her early queenship is demonstrative of her power and abilities, as is her education and the cultural impacts she made. Catherine was raised to be an educated monarch, and this education provided the basis for her time as Arthur's wife and later widow, before becoming Henry's wife, a title she never renounced calling herself his true wife several times in a letter to her cousin Charles V in 1531,

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<sup>272</sup> Earenfight, "Raising Infanta," 424.

My tribulations are so great, my life so disturbed by the plans daily invented to further the King's wicked intention, the surprises which the King gives me, with certain persons of his Council, are so mortal, and my treatment is what God knows, that it is enough to shorten ten lives, much more mine. As far as concerns this business, I have offended neither God nor the King, to whom I have always shown obedience as a true wife, and sometimes more so in this affair than my conscience approved of. Yet they treat me in such a manner that I do not know what to do, except to complain to God and your Majesty, with whom my remedy lies, and to beg you to cause the Pope to make such a speedy end of the matter as my truth merits. I pray God to pardon the Pope for his delay. In this world I will confess myself to be the King's true wife, and in the next they will know how unreasonably I am afflicted.<sup>273</sup>

Catherine's pain in her position was apparent to all who surrounded her, particularly after she was banished to a series of country manors without her daughter and the majority of her courtiers.

Anne Boleyn held extreme amounts of power as well, however the power that she possessed was significantly different than the power held by her predecessor. As we have established Anne Boleyn and Catherine of Aragon led significantly different lives and had different values and beliefs and were ultimately raised in two separate spheres of the same world with different expectations. Anne was never meant to become Queen, but she did. Her position as Queen of England was a result of Henry's unique need to produce a legitimate male heir to continue the Tudor Dynasty and Catherine's inability to produce a son who survived infancy. Anne's power lay in her potential whereas Catherine's lay in her value as a Spanish princess, but ultimately the need for an heir outmatched the fear of retribution from the Catholic Church, as well as Spain and her allies. Henry's split from the Catholic Church in order to marry Anne is remarkable as are the national and

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<sup>273</sup> Henry VIII, "Letters and Papers," 238.

international changes that resulted from such a switch, however minor liturgically they began.

Overall, all six of Henry's wives held power in unique ways as reflective of their significantly different personalities and priorities, as well as their roles. I would rank the wives and their independent power holdings in order from most to least overall: Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Catherine Parr, Jane Seymour, Catherine Howard, and Anne of Cleves. Each wives' power was held differently as well. Catherine of Aragon held unique political power as a result of her title as a Spanish princess in addition to her use of power that came from Henry VIII. Anne Boleyn's power came from her potential, as stated above, rather than what she was actually able to deliver. As a member of the English peerage herself she could not deliver anything that Henry was not free to take, and her connections domestically and abroad were not superb. Jane Seymour's power came from her potential, and immediately preceding her death her son, but before that time she was appealing to Henry for her seeming lack of interest in power. Jane was not a political person, nor did she generally bother herself with matters of state. Anne of Cleves was not necessarily a true wife of Henry VIII as they did not consummate the marriage; however, she considered herself as Henry VIII's sister and they maintained an amiable relationship for the remainder of their lives. Catherine Howard's power came from Henry's lust for her and his desire to, again, produce a male heir. Catherine was not politically minded and was overall a victim, in my opinion, of her environment and paid the ultimate price. Catherine Parr held power in her own right and had a unique relationship with Henry VIII. She was given religious freedoms that the previous wives were not given and was able to drive liturgical changes within the church and publish her

own book of prayers. Additionally, she had increased domestic influence over her predecessors as demonstrated by her ability to bring all of Henry's children together in a way they hadn't been previously.

The autonomy that the wives of Henry VIII experienced though the domestic sphere and independent control of their own households carried over to their children who were also granted their own households from birth. The gender issues and Henry's obsession with achieving a male heir were a continual issue for the women in Henry's life, whether it be his wives, family members, daughters, or subjects. In the case of Mary, Catherine and Henry's first and only daughter to survive infancy, her household was incredibly small and set up in a way that held her seemingly as a placeholder. Her staff was incredibly small, and "her household expenses were still listed as part of the daily expenses of the king's household; subsequently, they would be presented clearly as those of a separate establishment".<sup>274</sup> The smaller size of her household was not wholly unusual as she was a girl, and therefore did not enjoy the benefits that accompanied being the firstborn male child such as "no landed revenues from which to fund her household."<sup>275</sup> That said, Mary's status as the sole living child of the monarch would have made her the sole heir to the English crown and as such there is an argument that she should have been treated with some of the respect and trappings accompanying this status. Mary's status was elevated as no other potential heirs appeared from Catherine and the likelihood of having a female successor for Henry VIII increased and with it did Mary's prospect on

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<sup>274</sup> Jeri McIntosh, *From Heads of Household to Heads of State: The Preaccession Households of Mary and Elizabeth Tudor, 1516–1558* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>275</sup> McIntosh, *Heads of Household*.



the marriage market, leading to her engagement to the Dauphin of France and the establishment of a more formal household. From an incredibly young age, Mary showed herself to be a unique princess who was intended to hold a role similar to her mothers and grandmothers in the sense that she was to become a monarch in her own right. As she aged, she was fitted with the trimmings of the heir to the throne, although she surely lacked behind what her siblings were provided later in life. Mary continued to have her own household, of which she slowly gained increasing levels of control over as she aged and in the process, she began to establish her own court and began taking on more of the role of heir to her father's throne, even without the title.<sup>276</sup> With the rise of Anne Boleyn and the fall of her mother, Catherine, Mary too fell from grace and was left illegitimate. Mary's status, or lack thereof, was no longer an issue with the birth of Elizabeth whom,

was born of a marital union that was recognized only by the English church, and not by Roman Catholics in England or abroad. Henry was obliged to declare Elizabeth the heir to the throne immediately after her birth to provide a public reaffirmation of his commitment to the Boleyn marriage and his rejection both of Catherine Aragon as his wife and of Mary as his heir. Furthermore, Henry pressured Parliament into passing the first Act of Succession 1534, which declared Elizabeth the successor to the crown.<sup>277</sup>

Elizabeth's birth and the value placed on her would have come as a shock to Mary and her household as she was treated in a way consistent with how one would treat the heir of the throne. Mary's household spent ten percent less, on average what Henry's did, and, "As late as 1523, when Mary was seven, her household cost the king just under

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<sup>276</sup> McIntosh, *Heads of Household*.

<sup>277</sup> McIntosh, *Heads of Household*.

£1,100. For comparison purposes, the king's household averaged around £13,000 until the late 1530.”<sup>278</sup> Mary’s status in comparison to her sisters was markedly decreased,

The one stray reference to Elizabeth's household expenditure dates from March 1535 when her steward, Sir John Shelton, promised the king that he would attempt to rein in costs for the coming half-year.<sup>24</sup> He promised not to exceed substantially a total of £1,000 for the following six-month period. This suggests that the household of the two-year-old Elizabeth had already cost the king at least £2,000 per annum. This was roughly twice the cost of Mary's household from 1516 until 1533.<sup>279</sup>

Elizabeth’s elevated status disappeared with the birth of her brother Edward in 1537 when he was almost immediately appointed heir to the throne and given the titles of the Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall, and Earl of Chester and the monies from those estates were then used to fund his household, the princesses however did not have a direct funding source for their household.<sup>280</sup> Mary and Elizabeth’s experiences in leading a household and their upbringing in the heart of court intrigue influenced their lives and behaviors, and certainly influenced their decision making later in life including each of their time on the throne. The skills one learned in the domestic sphere as a woman translated into the political and diplomatic spheres and it is through their learning that they were able to independently and arguably successfully rule.

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<sup>278</sup> McIntosh, *Heads of Household*.

<sup>279</sup> McIntosh, *Heads of Household*.

<sup>280</sup> McIntosh, *Heads of Household*.

Appendix 1.

Portraits

Henry VIII<sup>281</sup>



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<sup>281</sup> “King Henry VIII - National Portrait Gallery,” 1520,  
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw03081/King-Henry-VIII;>



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<sup>282</sup> “King Henry VIII - National Portrait Gallery,” 1535,  
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw03084/King-Henry-VIII>.

Catherine of Aragon<sup>283</sup>



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<sup>283</sup> “Katherine of Aragon - National Portrait Gallery,” 1525,  
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw01143/Katherine-of-Aragon>.

Anne Boleyn<sup>284</sup>



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<sup>284</sup> “Anne Boleyn - National Portrait Gallery,” June 1533,  
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw00142/Anne-Boleyn>.

Jane Seymour<sup>285</sup>



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<sup>285</sup> “Jane Seymour - National Portrait Gallery,” 1537,  
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw272045/Jane-Seymour>.

Anne of Cleves<sup>286</sup>



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<sup>286</sup> Hans Holbein, "Portrait of Anne of Cleves," 1543,  
[https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/h/holbein/hans\\_y/1535h/04cleves.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/h/holbein/hans_y/1535h/04cleves.html).



Catherine Howard<sup>287</sup>



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<sup>287</sup> "Unknown Woman, Formerly Known as Catherine Howard - National Portrait Gallery," late 17th century, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw01146/Unknown-woman-formerly-known-as-Catherine-Howard>.

Catherine Parr<sup>288</sup>



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<sup>288</sup> “Katherine Parr - National Portrait Gallery,” 1545,  
<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw01957/Katherine-Parr>.

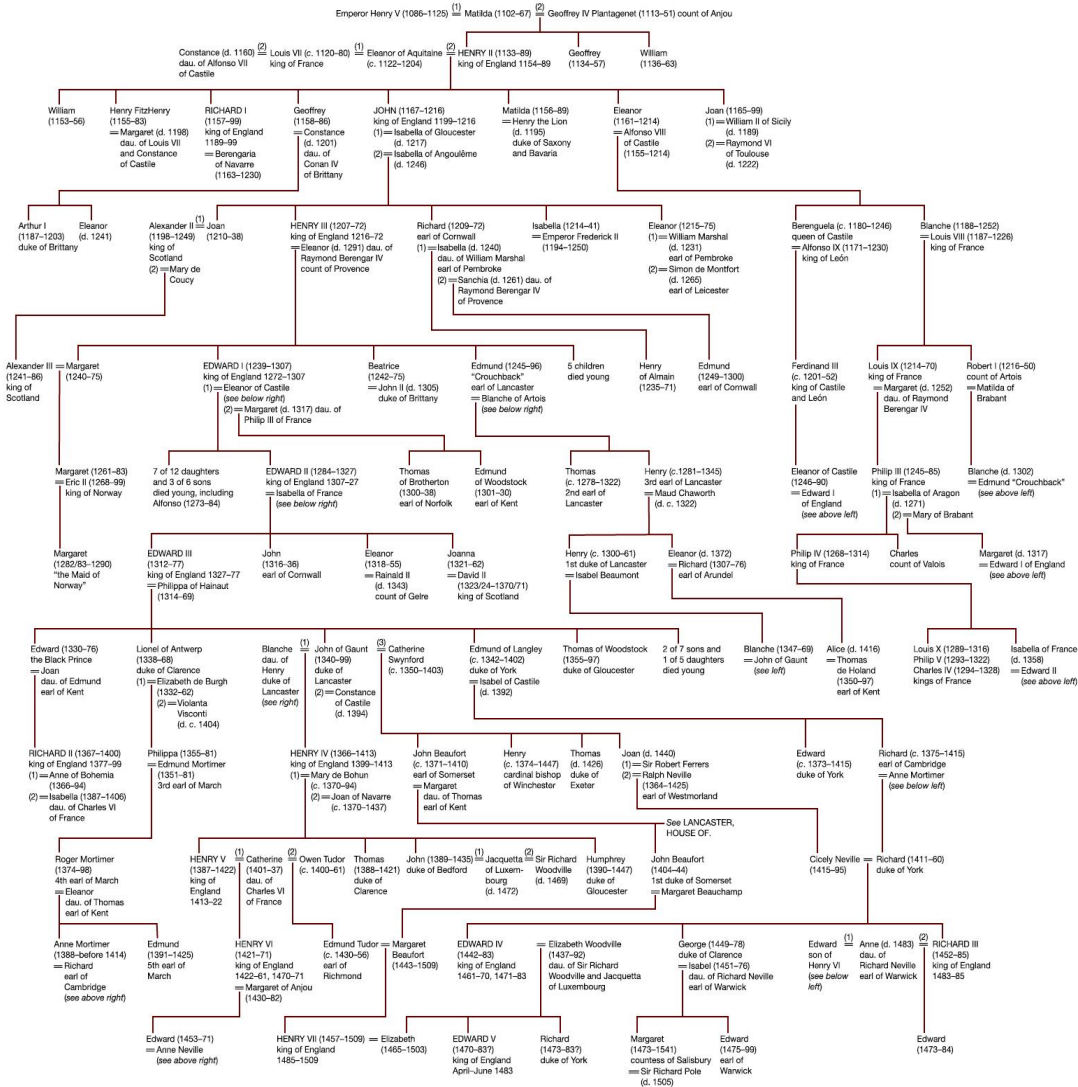
# Appendix 2.

## Family Trees

### Plantagenet Family<sup>289</sup>

#### House of Plantagenet

(Showing connections with the royal houses of France, Scotland, etc.)

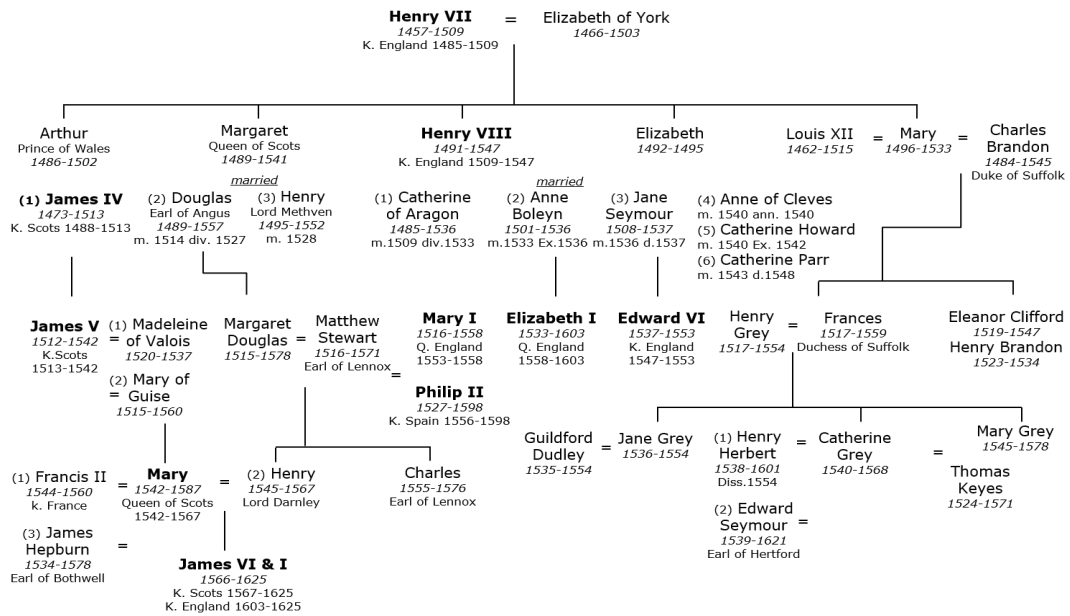


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<sup>289</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "House of Plantagenet," Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/house-of-York>.

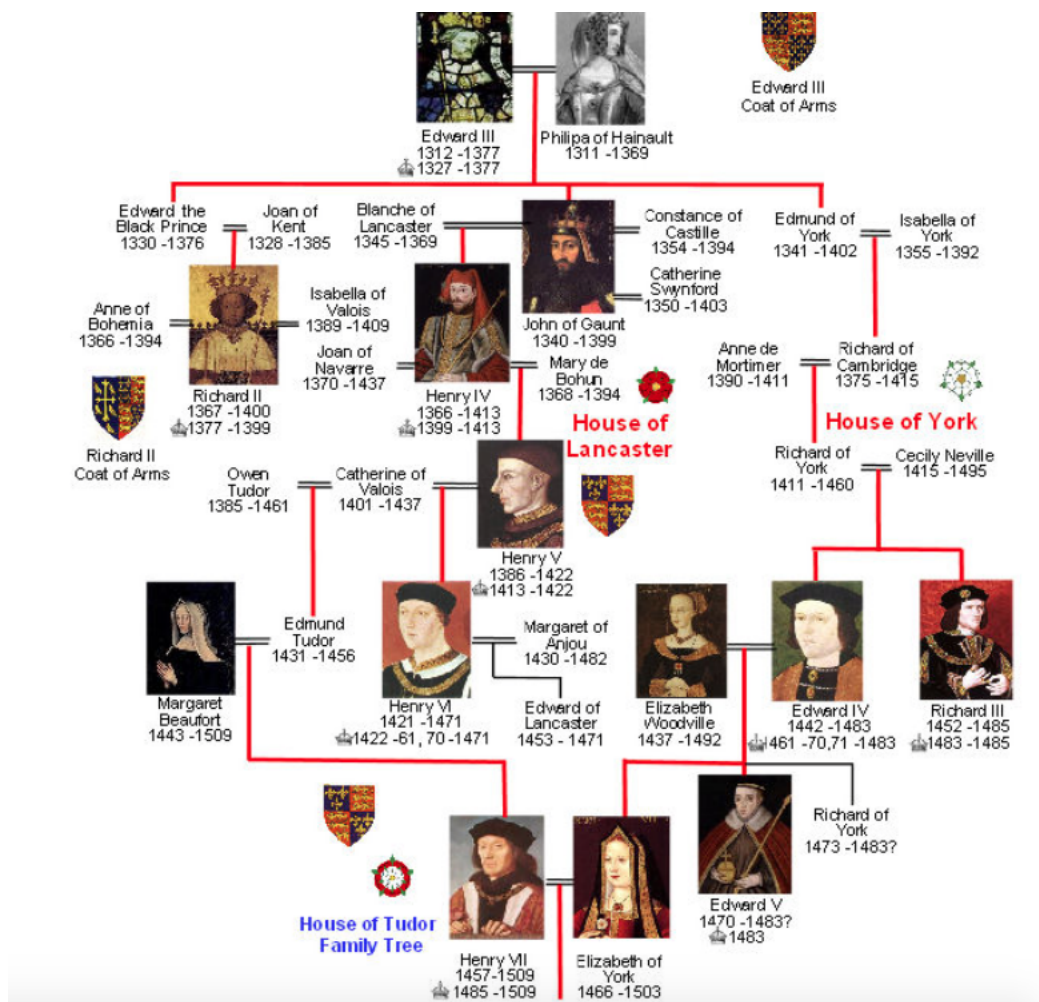
# Henry VIII<sup>290</sup>

## The History of England Podcast Family Trees The House of Tudor



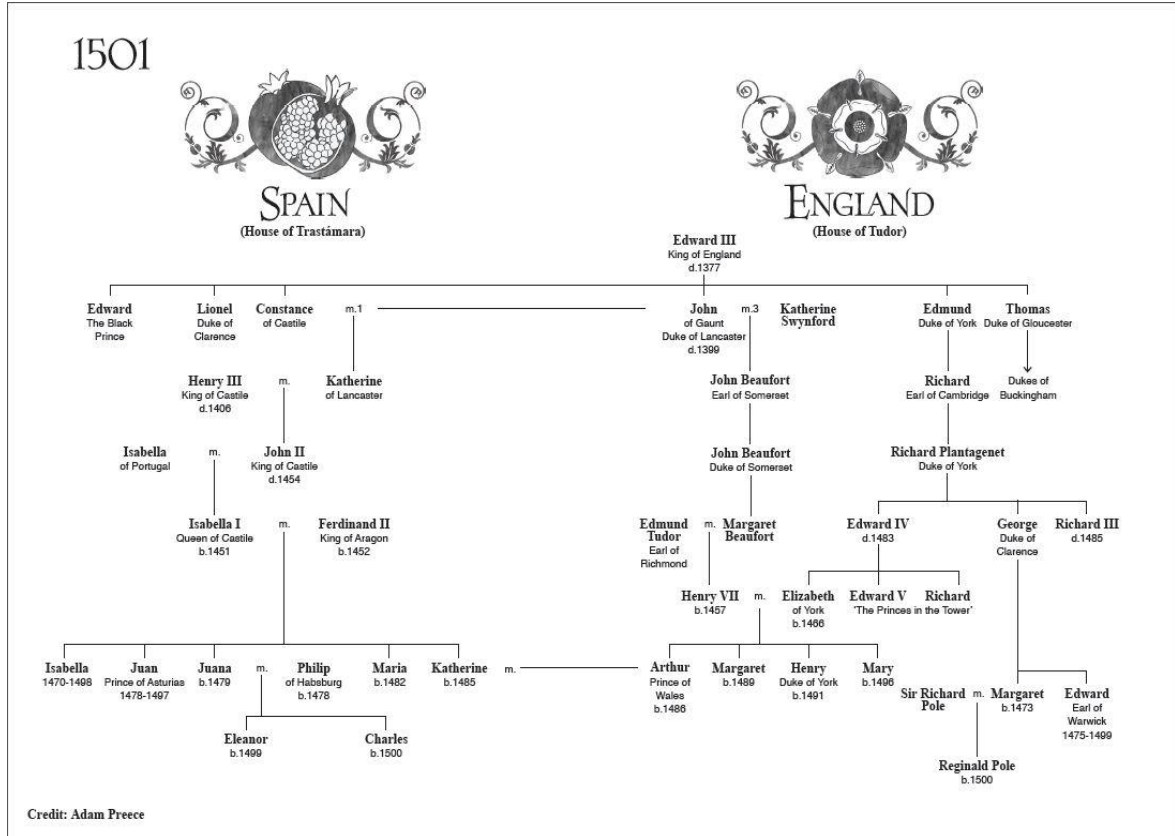
<sup>290</sup> David Crowther, "Family Tree: The House Of Tudor," The History of England Podcast, 2016, <https://thehistoryofengland.co.uk/resource/family-tree-the-house-of-tudor/>.

## House of Tudor<sup>291</sup>



<sup>291</sup> University of Illinois, "House of Tudor Family Tree," University of Illinois, 2015, <https://publish.illinois.edu/nguyenhist446/2015/09/13/the-legitimacy-of-henry-vii-an-argument-for-henry-tudors-claim/>.

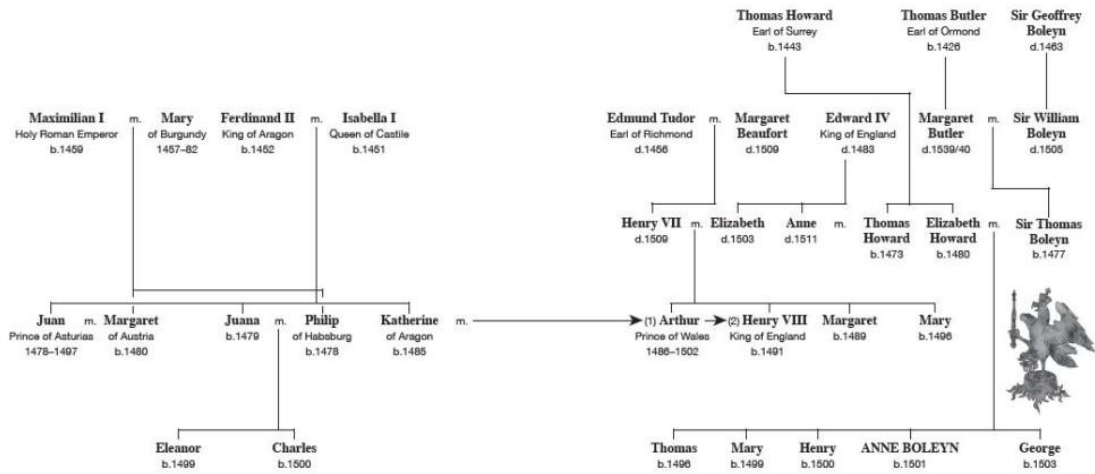
Catherine of Aragon<sup>292</sup>



<sup>292</sup> Adam Preece, "Katherine of Aragon's Family Tree," Headline Publishing Group, 2016, <https://sixtudorqueens.co.uk/2016/03/01/katherine-of-aragon-family-tree/>.

Anne Boleyn<sup>293</sup>

1512

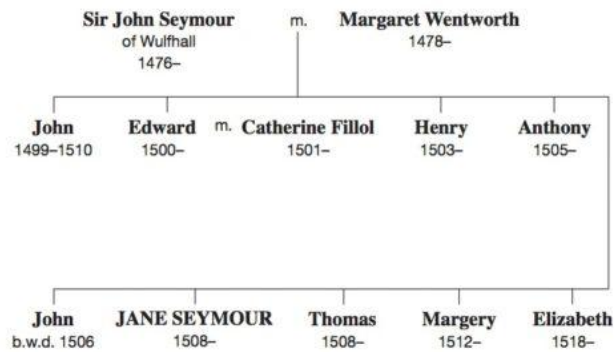


<sup>293</sup> Adam Preece, "Anne Boleyn's Family Tree," Headline Publishing Group, 2017, <https://sixtudorqueens.co.uk/2017/04/10/anne-boleyns-family-tree/>.

Jane Seymour<sup>294</sup>



THE SEYMOUR  
FAMILY

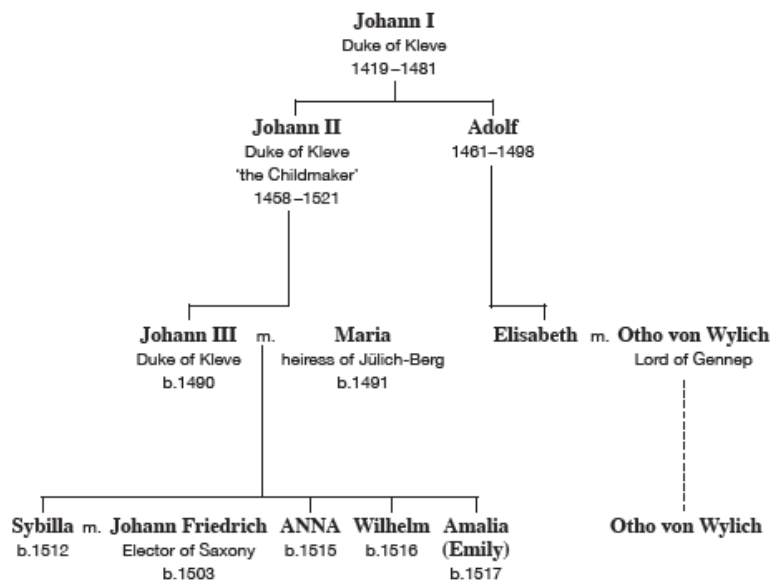


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<sup>294</sup> Adam Preece, "The Seymour Family Tree," Headline Publishing Group, 2018, <https://sixtudorqueens.co.uk/2018/04/24/192/>.

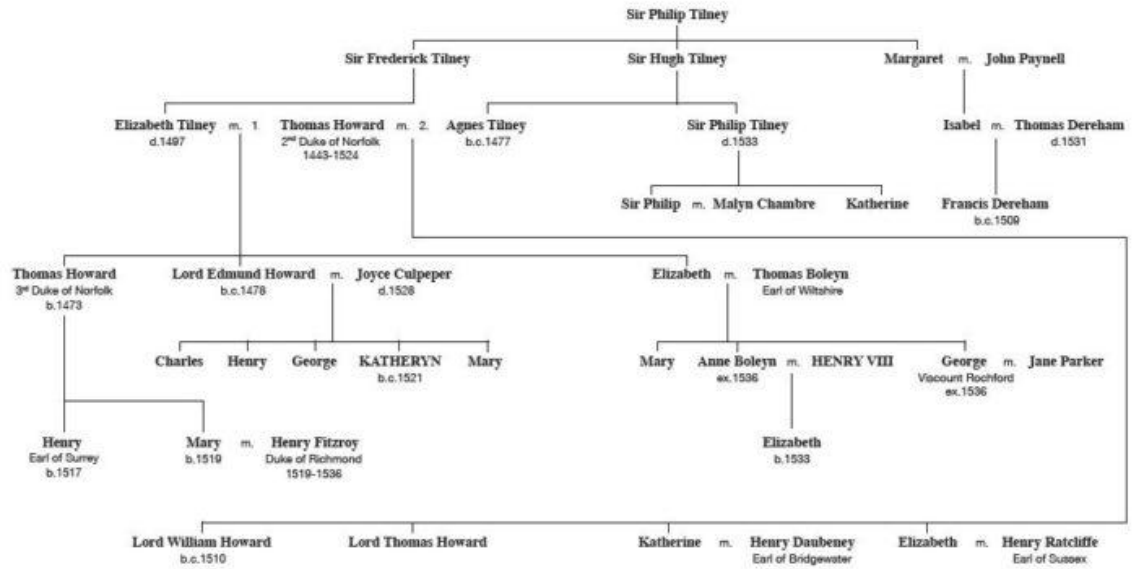


Anne of Cleves<sup>295</sup>



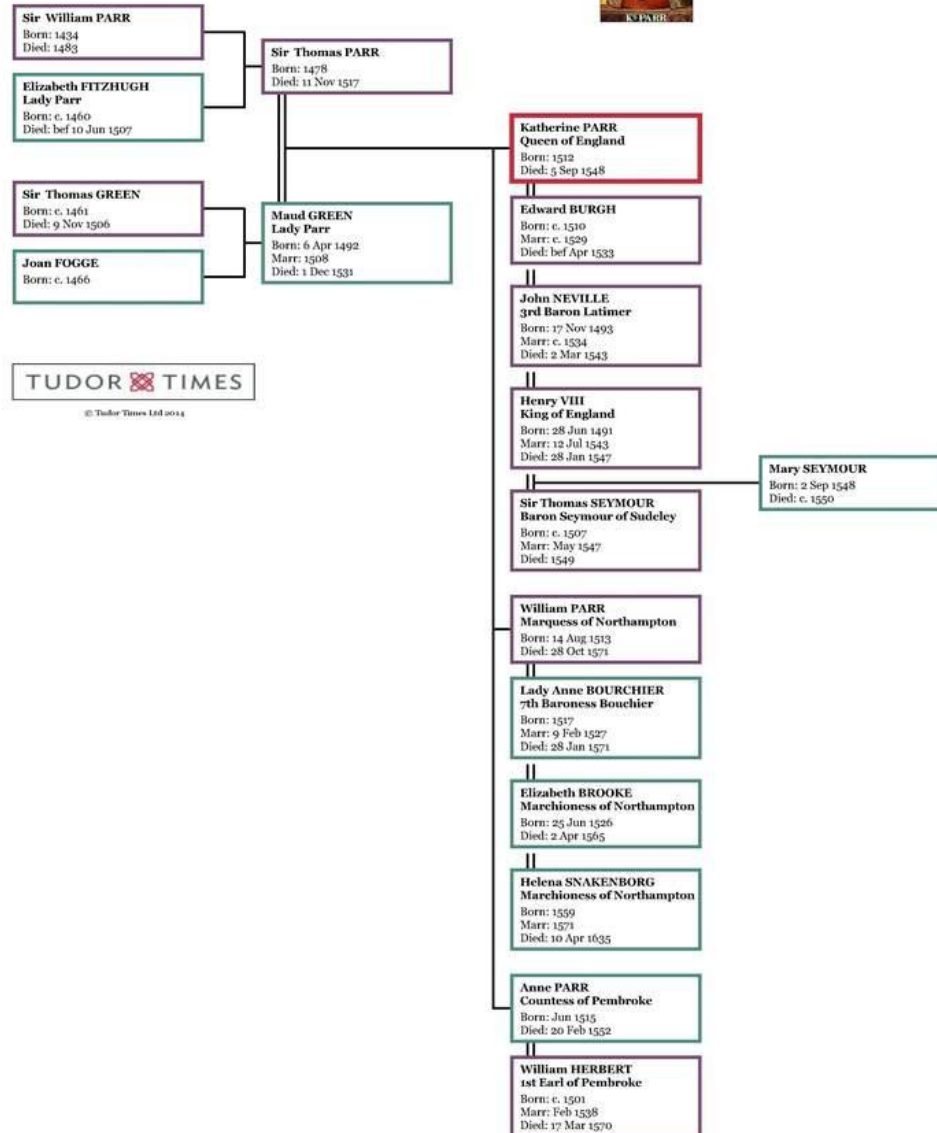
<sup>295</sup> Adam Preece, “Kleve: House of La Marck,” Headline Publishing Group, 2019, <https://sixtudorqueens.co.uk/2019/04/04/kleve-house-of-la-marck/>.

# THE HOWARDS AND THE TILNEYS



<sup>296</sup> Adam Preece, "The Howards and The Tillneys," Headline Publishing Group, 2020, <https://sixtudorqueens.co.uk/2020/03/10/the-howards-and-the-tillneys/>.

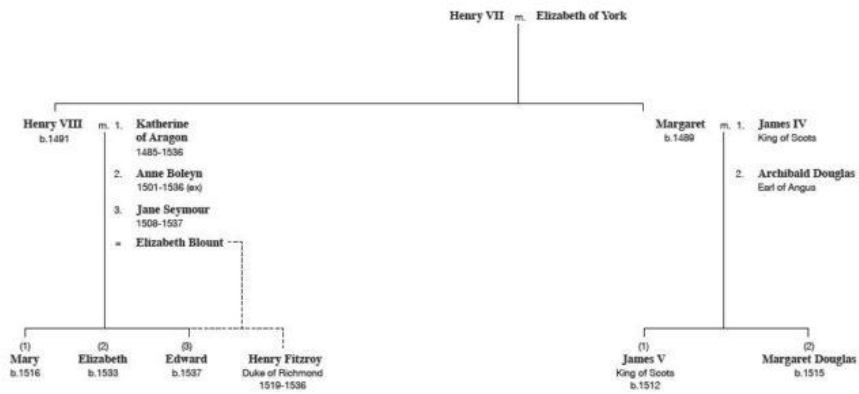
## Katherine PARR Queen of England



<sup>297</sup> Tudor Times, "Katherine Parr: Family Tree," Tudor Times Ltd., 2016, <https://shop.tudortimes.co.uk/products/katherine-parr-family-tree>.



1538  
THE HOUSE OF TUDOR



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<sup>299</sup> Adam Preece, "The House of Tudor," Headline Publishing Group, 2020, <https://sixtudorqueens.co.uk/2020/03/10/the-house-of-tudor/>.

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