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Image and reality : the lives of aristocratic women in early Tudor England.

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**Image and Reality:
the Lives of Aristocratic Women in Early Tudor England**

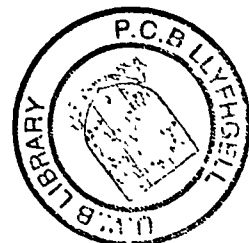
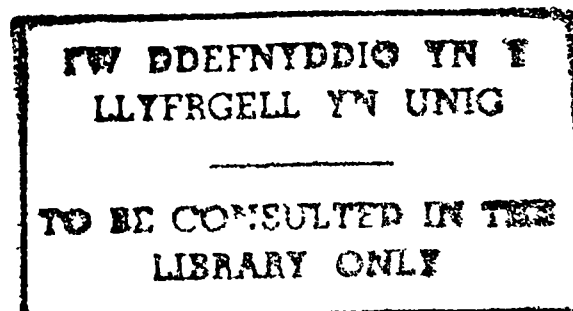
by

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Summary

The thesis examines both the image and the reality of upper class English women's lives in the period c. 1520 - c. 1560. The image is investigated through a study of the 'conduct books' and some other books written or published in English in that period, with a special emphasis on *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* by Juan Luis Vives. This material upholds the conventional patriarchal image which required woman to be chaste, submissive and home-based. A further aspect of the image of women is considered by a study of the law relating to women, based on *The Lawes Resolution of Women's Rights* by 'T E', and on relevant statutes. Much of the law relates to women and their rights regarding property

The second part of the thesis examines the reality of women's lives. This is done firstly through a small selection of litigation involving women in the Courts of Star Chamber, Chancery and Requests under Edward VI. Here again the main emphasis is on property. The major part of the study of 'reality' consists of case studies of the lives of five aristocratic women (two are gentlewomen rather than noblewomen). These are Honor Lady Lisle, Mary Countess of Northumberland (wife of the sixth Earl), Jane Lady Rochford, Susan Clarencius (chief lady in waiting to Mary Tudor) and Sabine Johnson (wife of a prosperous merchant)

Both the law cases and the biographies show that women did not always follow the prescriptive literature, and were often assertive especially when dealing with their property rights. However it becomes clear from the case studies and examples that the extent to which women followed the prescriptions varied with individual personalities and also with individual circumstances

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Preface

To undertake a postgraduate degree, part time, some twenty five years after last undertaking formal academic study, is both a daunting task and a life-changing process. It would have been impossible without a great deal of support and encouragement from many people, in both large and small ways. I wish to use this opportunity to thank those people.

Several historians took time to give me advice and encouragement particularly at the beginning of my research. I would especially like to thank Claire Cross for information about Reading Abbey, Alan Dyer for a discussion about the English Sweat, Charles Knighton for a reference on Susan Clarencius, and Christopher Haigh for providing me with a reference which (unbeknownst to Dr Haigh) proved to be a key piece of information about the Countess of Northumberland.

I have been able to draw on several people's professional expertise. Anthony North of the Victoria and Albert Museum gave me information about the Tonge Plaque, and Cheryl Thorogood of the Museum of London discussed with me the likely composition of Anne Basset's pearls. David Thomas F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G. helped me with suggestions about possible causes for Honor Lisle's and Mary Northumberland's gynaecological problems. Tudor palaeography became less daunting thanks to the excellent course run by the Borthwick Institute at York by David Smith and Chris Webb.

Staff in the various libraries and archives where I have worked have always been helpful and courteous. I would like to thank the staff I have dealt with at the Bodleian Library, the Borthwick Institute, the manuscripts room at the British Library, Lambeth Palace Library, the National Library of Wales, and the Public Record Office, both at Chancery Lane and more recently at Kew. I must particularly thank the staff at the library of the University of Wales, Bangor, notably Ann Illsley the inter-library loan librarian who took much trouble on my behalf. In addition I would like to thank the archivists at the Essex Record Office and the Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv Vienna who sent me copies of documents in their collections. Negative searches were kindly undertaken on my behalf by Penelope Fussell of the Draper's Company and by Alison McCann of the West Sussex Record Office, saving me unnecessary journeys, while Mike Spick of Sheffield City Library gave me information about Broomhall, Sheffield.

One of the pleasures I have found over the period of research has been sharing the experience with other people, and I would like to record my appreciation of the Bangor Tudor Workshops in 1993 and 1995, and the University of Wales postgraduate history conferences at Gregynnog in 1994 and 1996.

Living so far from the major archives and libraries is a problem which has been eased by kind hospitality from Trude and Hugh Rice in Oxford, and Monica Todd in Aberystwyth. I am especially grateful for the unstinting hospitality over the entire seven year period of my researches offered by my brother and sister-in-law Colin and Maureen Wright, which has made the use of London archives not only possible, but also a pleasure.

Many non-historian friends have taken an interest in my work and have often offered stimulating insights. As a part-time student my life has included other aspects besides research, and I would like to thank my colleagues at St Brigid's School,

Denbigh for their support, interest and occasional tolerance. One of the other aspects of my life is of course my family. My two daughters Catherine and Lucy have been appreciative and also understanding of a mother who was studying at the same time as they were. My husband Richard has been continually supportive both morally and practically, and has accepted domestic disruption with good grace. My final acknowledgement is to my supervisor, David Loades, for his exacting, but constructive criticism, his support, and his constant encouragement.

Transcriptions from manuscripts and from early printed books are my own except those from the *Lisle Letters* and some from the Johnson Papers where I have quoted from Barbara Winchester's thesis. These are indicated in the notes. Transcriptions from early printed books are mostly taken from the microfilm editions of the *S.T.C.* books published by University Microfilms. Original spelling has been used, but contractions have normally been silently extended, and the letters u and v, and i and j, have been used in the modern way (except for numbers).

Abbreviations Used

B L	British Library
Cal	Calendar
Dom	Domestic
Eliz	Elizabeth
f	folio
Hen	Henry
<i>I.P.</i>	<i>Letters & Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII</i> ed J Gairdner et al
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Isle Letters</i> ed M St C Byrne
ms , mss	manuscript, manuscripts
no , nos	number, numbers
p , pp	page, pages
P R O	Public Record Office
Pat	Patent
P & M }	Philip and Mary
Phil & Mar }	
S P	State Papers
Span	Spanish
vol	volume

Dates are given in New Style (i.e. the year is taken to begin on 1st January)

Chapter One

Introduction

The role of women in the past has been exposed to an increasing amount of attention from historians in the last thirty years of the twentieth century. In the early 1970s a historian could make a polemical point by entitling a book about British women's search for political equality '*Hidden from History*', while another historian could ask the question 'Did women have a Renaissance?' in terms which made clear she expected a negative response.¹ That situation has now greatly changed. The study of women's history has become normal at the academic level, and has even become compulsory for school children.² Despite this acceptance, at times the history of women can seem to be peripheral, not 'real' history like the study of politics, and linked for instance to the study of minorities. There has also been a tendency to see the history of women through the filter of late twentieth century preoccupations which can lead to anachronistic emphases especially when dealing with a period such as the sixteenth century when the priorities were very different.

There was a considerable interest in the role of women during the sixteenth century. Some of this was prompted by the chance that brought women rulers to several European countries, including female sovereigns in England for fifty years. In England this was effectively without precedent, and contemporary writers were forced to consider the legitimacy of female rule. Some writers were convinced that God's will could not have been expressed this way, and that rule by a woman was an abomination. Others, accepting reality, if grudgingly, tried to find ways of justifying the situation and showing that a female ruler did not necessarily cause offence to God

¹ Joan Kelly, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance', first published in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz eds. *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (1977) Reprinted in Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago 1984) pp. 19-50. *Hidden from History* is the title of a book by Sheila Rowbottom on British women's fight for equality, published in 1973 in the early days of the feminist history movement. Sheila Rowbottom, *Hidden from History*, (London 1973/1990)

² 'Pupils should be taught to analyse . . . the experiences of men *and women*' (my italics) *History in the National Curriculum: Wales* (Cardiff 1995), from the orders for the programmes of study for Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14). However, Rosemary Kelly, *A wider world: the making of the United Kingdom 1500-1750* (Cheltenham 1992) a typical text book for this age group, has only one page specifically concerning the lives of early modern women (p. 15), emphasising that women are still not considered to be a major focus for study.

and man.³ Many writers considered the role of women more generally, and laid down codes of behaviour for them to follow. In some cases these books were straightforwardly didactic, but others were far more polemical, following on from medieval precedents of the *querelle des dames*. What is clear is that for many reasons, including the new freedom of clerical marriage brought by the reformation, male writers and scholars in the sixteenth century showed great interest in women.

There were certain basic themes to all these works, which can be usefully summed up in the expression 'chastity, silence and obedience'. These will be explored in more detail in the chapter on the Image of Women, but can be briefly summarised as the requirements that women should be celibate if unmarried and faithful if married, should recognise the superiority of their menfolk, and should neither gossip nor put their own ideas forward. It is necessary to be aware that all women lived against the background of these assumptions, though as will be seen they interpreted them in different ways. Society was fundamentally patriarchal, and most women appear to have accepted this situation. This patriarchy did not simply regard women as inferior. Women were believed to be inferior in certain areas but were accepted as having skills and desirable qualities in other areas. The home was fundamentally the woman's domain, and her place there was respected. However the home by definition was private, and domestic matters were far less likely to enter the documentary record than were the affairs of the public world which was considered the man's domain. It is either when domestic matters for some reason became public, or when women crossed over into the public world (by taking a case to the law courts for instance) that we are most likely to have evidence of women's views and actions.

Many of the studies of early modern women, particularly those in book form, have covered a long period; the combined sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is quite usual, and some authors and editors have taken the entire period from 1500 to 1800.⁴

³ Amanda Shepherd *Gender and Authority* (Keele 1994)

⁴ See for example Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A history of women in western Europe vol. 1 1500-1800*; (London 1995); Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760* (London 1994); Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London 1985); Natalie Zemon Davis & Arlette Farge, eds, *A History of Women vol. 3, Renaissance and Enlightenment paradoxes* [covering the period 1500-1800] (Cambridge Mass. 1993).

This is perhaps no less logical than books on medieval women encompassing both the women of the eighth century and the women of the fifteenth, as if their experiences were nearer to each other than those of the Paston women for instance to their early Tudor cousins. Certainly the period between 1500 and 1800 saw major changes in women's lives (as of course in men's also). Even where historians have been content with, for instance, the 'long sixteenth century' there is a tendency to concentrate on the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period, what could be termed 'the age of Shakespeare' There is logic to this. The late sixteenth century saw a virulent outbreak of the *querelle des dames*, the long-running literary controversy about women, culminating in the writings of the author his enemies called 'Swetnam the woman hater' and their responses to him.⁵ The quarrel was in part literary, though it did see some popular expression in ballads and woodcuts. But the burgeoning of literature and especially of the theatre has given this period much of its attraction. The slightly (or not so slightly) ambivalent sexuality of a Viola or a Rosalind (a boy actor portraying an adult woman disguised as a young man), appeals to an age which, even if it does not wear its sexuality on its sleeve, is at least endlessly and openly absorbed by it The apparent 'transvestism' of a few late Elizabethan women in London perhaps evokes a response from their more comfortably trouser-suited descendants But it was never more than a tiny minority who affected more or less masculine dress⁶

The earlier Tudor period does not offer these literary models, or transvestite controversies, and perhaps because of this has appealed less to the student of woman's history, at least from the English viewpoint. (The development of women's role in the continental Reformation has made the early sixteenth century more appealing to historians of Germany for example.)⁷ The first female English sovereign

⁵ Louis B. Wright, *Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, (London 1964, reprinting 1935 edition) pp. 486-507; Diane Purkiss, 'Material Girls: the seventeenth century woman debate' in Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss, eds, *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760* (London 1992) pp. 79-101. Joseph Swetnam's original attack and some of the responses to it are reproduced in facsimile in Charles Butler (intro) *Female Replies to Swetnam the Woman Hater* (Bristol 1995)

⁶ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven/London 1995) pp. 23-24

⁷ See for instance Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford 1989)

lacks the the charismatic attraction of her younger and more successful sister, and Henry VIII, who dominates the period as he dominated his realm in Holbein's portraits, but denied to women the right to read the English Bible, was not an obvious defender of the position of women. Yet the role of women was important in the first half of the sixteenth century as it was in the second half. There was indeed an episode in the *querelle des dames* in the 1540s, and one of the most influential books about women was published in the 1520s.⁸

The decision was taken to concentrate on the period 1520 to 1560, partly because as stated there has been less interest shown in this period. Secondly it covers the early Reformation in England, though not the eventual triumph of Protestantism. There is an opportunity to see whether the early religious changes actually made any difference to women. Thirdly, this period largely ignores the reign of Elizabeth, especially the latter part of the reign when people had come to accept a woman on the throne and had perhaps altered their views on women accordingly. However while a survey of literature can be restricted to fairly rigid time parameters, biographical studies are inevitably more fluid. The chronological emphasis here has been on women the majority of whose adult lives fell within the given dates

Inevitably a thesis of this kind which aims to study women and their lives through a variety of means, including literature, biography and the law, must be selective in its content. It would have been impossible to examine every book published between 1520 and 1560 for any relevant material on the subject of women. Instead an initial study of the titles given in the *Short Title Catalogue* was undertaken, and all those works in English whose titles suggested relevance were noted.⁹ The list was restricted to books available in English on the grounds that only a tiny group of women could read Latin, but a far wider group would have been able to read English. A substantial number of these were studied. Most of these works were part of that group generally described as 'conduct books' though this is a somewhat misleading title. Books with significant comments on the role of women do not

⁸ Juan Luis Vives *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (trans. Richard Hyrde c.1528)

⁹ A. W. Pollard & G.R. Redgrave eds., with revisions by W.A. Jackson, F.S. Ferguson & K.F. Panzer) *A Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England* . . . hereafter *S.T.C.* (London 1976 - 1991)

necessarily concentrate primarily on advice to women as to how they should behave. For reasons of time and space, fiction and ballads were excluded.

When this study was begun in 1991, one of the foremost questions in mind was 'How far did the conduct books reflect the actual lives of women?' Were the conduct books in fact prescriptive or descriptive? Since then, historians have been more prepared to say that while the conduct books may have been prescriptive (or proscriptive) they were not, or at least not completely, descriptive.¹⁰ What is less clear and what will be addressed here, in addition to the original question, is 'Did the prescriptive/proscriptive standpoint of the conduct books have any effect on the lives of real people?' Was the the behaviour or the opinion of 'ordinary people' influenced by the behaviour of the conduct books? Did people, in fact, take any notice of the way that they were supposed to behave?

The terms 'ordinary people' or indeed 'real people' used here need qualifying. What is meant are people living their normal lives, not obviously following the precepts of educators or theologians. Margaret More Roper, for example, would not be admissible because her life was lived in the shadow of a man who determined to bring up his daughters following the new educational ideas. The subjects of the biographical section of this thesis are a small group of aristocratic women, who might not be considered 'ordinary' by some definitions. The term aristocratic is stretched to include some members of what the Tudors might have called the lesser nobility, and we would call the gentry. Only in the chapter on women and the law do some of the examples come from a lesser social position. The choice of noble and gentle women is justified by the simple truth that to reconstruct a detailed biographical study, adequate detailed archive material is necessary. Regrettably poor women left relatively little impact on the archive material of Tudor England. Even upper class women can be

¹⁰ Anthony Fletcher suggests that the very repetition of the prescriptions came from the fact that the 'biblical pattern of acceptable behaviour' was breaking down 'all along the line'. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, p. 256. See also Alison Wall, 'Elizabethan precept and Feminine practice: the Thynne family at Longleat' *History* LXXV (1990)

very elusive.¹¹ It could also be noted that poor women were less likely than rich women to be literate, and in any case conduct books were rarely addressed to them.¹²

Once the basic parameters of a group of biographical studies of aristocratic women who flourished in the period 1520 to 1560 had been established, a selection process was necessary. Further parameters were determined. The women must not be royal, by birth or marriage, since such women were obviously exceptional by upbringing, experience or both. More remote kinship to royalty or royal service though would not debar a woman. The existence of a recent scholarly study of the woman was also an objection, though again if a woman was only partially the subject of study, or if the study was not very recent, this would not constitute a barrier. The woman considered must have interest in her own right, not simply as someone's wife. Finally and most importantly, there must be adequate and accessible archival material sufficient to produce a biographical study if not a full biography. Remembering the relative invisibility of women, this could be a problem, and some early choices such as Katherine Gordon were abandoned when it appeared that there was unlikely to be sufficient material¹³

It is recognised that the selection of Honor, Lady Lisle as a subject for study may appear to contravene the criterion regarding recent serious works. The edition of the *Lisle Letters* by Muriel St Clare Byrne of 1981 clearly constitutes serious study, and may be considered recent.¹⁴ It could be argued, somewhat speciously, that Byrne's *magnum opus* is not specifically about Lady Lisle. It must though be

¹¹ In the two cases studies considered in this thesis where there is a very large amount of archive material (those of Lady Lisle and Sabine Johnson) its preservation was due to the families concerned falling foul of the authorities and having their papers confiscated. It is possible that the Shrewsbury family archives contained more references to Mary Countess of Northumberland before those papers were sorted by a seventeenth century archivist. See Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, (London, 1997) p. 87 for comments on the chances of archive survival and destruction.

¹² It is true that conduct books, especially later in the century, were often directed at the growing urban middle class (though these were hardly 'poor'). This is not obviously the case with the works studied here, though they may well have had a middle class readership.

¹³ Katherine Gordon, the daughter of the Earl of Huntley, was given in marriage by her cousin James IV of Scotland to 'Richard IV' later revealed to be the pretender Perkin Warbeck, and later married Christopher Ashton, who took part in the Dudley conspiracy.

¹⁴ Muriel St Clare Byrne, ed. *The Lisle Letters* (6 volumes, Chicago 1981)

accepted that Lady Lisle has been included here because the great wealth of detailed information about her life, made particularly accessible by Byrne's edition of the *Letters*, provides a possibly unique example of one woman's life and her responses to the challenges, problems and opportunities that were presented to her.

The other woman whose life has already received substantial study is Sabine Johnson. The Johnson family and their papers were the subject of a thesis and later a book written in the mid 1950s by Barbara Winchester. In Sabine's case the distance of forty years would seem to justify a fresh consideration of her life, taking a different perspective from that of Winchester, who apparently accepted the conventional views of her own time on the position of women and was content to apply those views to Sabine. Unlike Byrne, Winchester never published her transcriptions of the Johnson Papers¹⁵, and Sabine could be seen as just one of the personae of *Tudor Family Portrait*, not the main character.

Mary, Countess of Northumberland, and Jane, Viscountess Rochford, both appear as 'minor characters' in other people's lives, but have not previously been considered for their own sake, while Susan Clarentius is hardly more than a footnote in biographies of Mary Tudor. All these women have in common the fact that their actions received criticism from their contemporaries, and in two cases from historians. Countess Mary has previously been cast in a negative light by those historians who have considered her, in the process of giving her husband's side of the story.¹⁶ An attempt is made here to redress the balance, looking at her life from a position that shows sympathy with Mary. Jane Rochford is of course another woman with a bad reputation. Again a fresh look is taken, and while ultimately Jane cannot be cleared of all blame for the events that led to her death, once more a rather less hostile perspective is considered. Susan Clarentius, the least known of these three little

¹⁵ The transcriptions of the Johnson papers form volumes 2 to 4 of Winchester's thesis, *The Johnson Letters* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis University of London 1953). Her book *Tudor Family Portrait* (London 1955) was closely based on the first, narrative, volume of the thesis, but in the book she gave no references to the letters she cited.

¹⁶ The most obvious example here is E.B. de Fontblanque, *Annals of the House of Percy* (London 1887) e.g. vol. 1 p. 478, but A.G. Dickens is also very sharp about Mary. See A.G. Dickens, ed., *Clifford Letters of the sixteenth century*. Surtees Society vol. 172 (Durham 1962) p. 45

known Tudor women, received some criticism in her own lifetime (though in circumstances where she is unlikely to have been aware of it).¹⁷

The question of typicality arises. Can a group of women be used for case studies regarding the position of early Tudor women in general, unless they are typical? Are they indeed in any way representative of their peers? It is worth considering the question of typicality. What was a typical early Tudor woman like? Any attempt to answer this brings us back to the heart of the problem. Our image of the typical Tudor woman is likely to be substantially based either on the well-known but exceptional example (Bess of Hardwick perhaps), or on the teachings of the conduct books. In the 1950s Carroll Camden wrote a portrait of *The Elizabethan Woman* which was largely based on conduct and similar books.¹⁸ Yet its title would seem to suggest that it described what the Elizabethan woman was actually like. We can of course use the conduct books to guide us. If the conduct books generally make assumptions about typicality, we can be guided by them in the absence of contrary indications. Vives, Raynald, and Tusser all make references to women acting as medical practitioners to their family and neighbours, and a similar point is made by later writers also.¹⁹ It would seem reasonable to assume that this was typical behaviour, especially as we know that there is documentary evidence of women making remedies and treating patients.²⁰ In other instances the conduct books insist on the appropriateness of certain behaviour with an emphasis that itself might make us suspicious that the behaviour they commend was not in fact typical. Vives' emphasis on women staying within the house, for instance, has a somewhat hysterical edge to it which suggests that he was not describing real behaviour. Documentary

¹⁷ See below pp. 240-242

¹⁸ Carroll Campden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (London 1952)

¹⁹ See e.g. Gervase Markham *The English Housewife* (1615 and later editions) ed. Michael R. Best (Montreal 1994). Markham's first chapter is entitled 'Of Physical Surgery' and mainly consists of recipes for remedies.

²⁰ Lady Grace Mildmay gave much of her time to making medicines, apparently on what amounted to a commercial scale. Lynda Pollock, *With Faith and Physic: the life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay 1552-1620* (London 1993) pp. 92-142. Lady Margaret Hoby also made remedies and even apparently attempted surgery. *The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby* ed. Dorothy M. Meads, (London 1930) p. 184. Lady Lisle also made remedies.

evidence (for example of women traders in Oxford), as well as the quite different emphasis of Tusser, make clear that women in fact did not stay at home.²¹

The second chapter of the thesis deals with a group of women who were apparently atypical, the women who were involved in legal cases. The chapter on law considers both theory and practice, appearing perhaps as a microcosm of the wider argument. The discussion of the theory, on what the law actually laid down, is based primarily on the important legal textbook, *The Lawes Resolution of Womens Rights*.²² This was published in the early seventeenth century, and is clearly outside the chronological parameters laid down for the thesis. Its inclusion is due to its uniqueness, and to the way that its author (identified only as T.E.) was prone to give a retrospective view of the law, even at times an archaic one, as well as dealing with contemporary practices. This survey of the law as it applied to women, is accompanied by a brief, selective study of women as users of the law, both plaintiffs and defendants, primarily in the equity courts. Women's use of the church courts in defamation cases has been examined by Martin Ingram and Laura Gowing, revealing women's readiness to litigate where their honour was impugned.²³ Honour for a woman was clearly equated with chastity, and it is no coincidence that most defamation cases concerning women involved sexual slurs. Chastity however did not prevent these women from exercising a public role to defend their threatened reputation. Equally women were prepared to accuse their neighbours when they suspected dishonourable behaviour, and they were prepared to use highly disparaging language to do this. The women litigants considered in the thesis were mainly

²¹ Apprenticeship agreements in Oxford from 1520 to 1540 were often made out to a man *et uxore*. 69 of 175 agreements made in Henry VIII's reign were in this form, making it clear that the wife was seen to be an active partner in the business. Mary Prior, 'Women and the urban economy: Oxford 1500-1800' in M. Prior, ed. *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London 1985) p. 104

²² 'T.E.' *The Lawes Resolution of Womens Rights or the Lawes Provision for Woemen* (London 1632)

²³ Laura Gowing 'Language Power and the Law; Women's slander litigation in early modern London' in Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker eds, *Women Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London 1994), and see also Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London*, (Oxford 1996) which I was not able to use for the law chapter. Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England 1570-1640* (Cambridge 1987) chapter 10

defending their property, not their reputation for chastity, but they seem to have done this with equal vigour.

The problem of selection again arose, since constraints of time and space prevented an exhaustive study of cases. Studies of women's use of Chancery and the Court of Requests have already been undertaken by Maria Cioni and Tim Stretton,²⁴ but in both cases these are based mainly on the Elizabethan period. For this thesis therefore the reign of Edward VI was chosen, as a mid point when the courts were dominated neither by a personality such as Wolsey, nor by a government with a persecuting religious agenda. The determining factor in the selection of cases for study was that the calendar references indicated the involvement of women as litigants, either plaintiffs, defendants or both.²⁵ Some preference was given when a case had women on both sides, but not to the extent of unbalancing the sample. The sample is clearly too small to be statistically meaningful, but does give a small snapshot view of the way that women were using the courts, or having the courts used against them. Examples were taken from the three equity courts of Star Chamber, Requests and Chancery.

When considering the behaviour of women in general, it is possible to assess this alongside the prescriptions of the conduct books. In the area of the law, however, it is far less easy thus to analyse theory and its relation to practice. The theory in any case relates largely to the common law, where woman's position was proverbially weak. The proverb, after all, defended a man's right to beat his wife. The married woman in theory effectively had no legal position: she did not exist, being subsumed into her husband. The equity courts, as both Maria Cioni and Pearl Hogrefe have indicated, were prepared to assist wives to circumvent these restrictions.²⁶

²⁴ Tim Stretton, *Women and Litigation in the Elizabethan Court of Requests* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge 1993); Tim Stretton 'Women, custom and equity in the Court of Requests' in Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker, eds, *Women Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London 1994). Maria Lynn Cioni, *Women and Law in Elizabethan England with particular reference to the Court of Chancery* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge 1974); Maria Lynn Cioni, 'The Elizabethan Chancery and Women's Rights' in D. J. Guth and J. W. McKenna, eds. *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G.R. Elton from his American Friends*, (Cambridge 1982)

²⁵ See Appendix for the complete list of cases studied.

²⁶ Cioni op. cit.; Pearl Hogrefe, 'Legal rights of Tudor women and the [sic] circumvention by men' *Sixteenth Century Journal* 3 (1972)

Circumventing the law was not ignoring it, however, and while the equity courts, notably Chancery, might be prepared to consider the rights of a married woman (to an inheritance for example) they would normally only hear her case in conjunction with her husband. Women had no option but to take the law seriously (as indeed did their husbands), they could not simply ignore the parts they did not like. A direct comparison with women's reactions to the conduct books is not possible. However the study of the use women made of the law does reveal much about their attitudes both to the law and to their role in society in general.

The chapters on the image of woman as presented by the conduct book writers, and on the law, between them present a picture of the role which was expected of women, a role in which the three virtues of chastity, silence and obedience were the paramount characteristics. In addition the chapter on the image considers such related matters as education, and the attitudes taken towards women's gynaecological health. The other half of the equation, the reality of (at least some) women's lives, is presented by the second part of the law chapter, and the five biographical studies. Only after this, when real lives and ideal images can be seen in parallel, can a conclusion be drawn which can attempt to answer the questions asked earlier in this introduction. Did the idealised image of women in any way reflect women's lives? Were women restricted in their real lives by the constraints of the image? What, ultimately, were the factors which determined the way the upper class women of early Tudor England lived their lives?

Chapter Two

The Image of women

This chapter will examine the material about the role of women written or published in English from about 1520 to about 1560. To provide a framework the chapter is loosely organised around the life cycle of a woman, from childhood, through to marriage and motherhood, and finally to widowhood, though with some deviations from this pattern where appropriate. Some of the books of the period about women, such as Vives' *De Institutione Foemininae Christianae* followed this traditional format, and others referred to certain parts of the woman's life (such as the *Seven sorrowes of a woman whose husband is lately dead*, which concentrates on widowhood). The first part of the chapter however will consider the general attitude of many writers towards women, and in particular to the two traditional stereotypes of woman as Eve or as Mary

First, some quotations are useful to set the scene.

Of which words it is plaine that the Apostle meaneth (in I Corinthians 11) that woman in her greatest perfection shuld have knowen that man was Lord above her . in her greatest perfection woman was created to be subject to man. But after her fall and rebellion comitted against God, there was put upon her a newe necessitie, and she was made subject to man by the irrevocable sentence of God, pronounced in these words I will greatlie multiply thy sorowe and thy conception, with sorowe shalt thou beare thy children, and thy will shall be subject to thy man; and he shall beare dominion over the ¹

Thou art the porte and gate of the devil. Thou art the first transgressor of goddes law ²

The devil 'thought to deceyve the Woman for she is of much febler nature to withstande temptacion³

Woman is the most perfect of God's works and the most worthy and most excellent of all creatures.⁴

This group of quotations illustrates the central dichotomy of the conventional views of woman as expressed in the 'conduct books'. Women are stereotyped as

¹ John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, (London 1557) f.13 v.

² Knox, *First Blast*, f.18 r. quoting Tertullian

³ Anon., *The Deceyte of Women* (1557) sig. Aii v.

⁴ Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *On the Nobility of Women Kind* (1542) sig. A iii v.

epitomising evil (the devil's gateway) or as epitomising good (the most perfect work of God). This can be considered as the Mary/Eve dichotomy, though it must be said that the writers considered here refer explicitly to Eve more than to Mary. Mary might be an embarrassment to Protestant writers like Knox, but Eve certainly was not.

As stereotypes, neither 'Mary' nor 'Eve' has much to do with 'real' women. Rather they are used to express the views of the writers about 'woman' as a concept. However real women were of course in the background. Knox wrote to a political agenda. While the extracts quoted above might seem to be an attack on women in general, Knox was really writing a polemic against women in the specific role of rulers, and against the Catholic Mary Tudor and Mary of Guise in particular. Knox's attack on women as rulers led to a whole sub-species of the 'woman debate' or *querelle des dames* concentrating on this particular aspect of woman's life. Just as the attackers of women had a 'hidden agenda' so often did the defenders. John Aylmer, hoping to please Queen Elizabeth, wrote a defence of the woman ruler, though in terms that suggest he was less than feminist in a modern sense⁵ while Agrippa published his paean in praise of woman's virtue to win the favour of Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands.⁶

We must be aware that we cannot assume that the views expressed are necessarily those genuinely held by the writers. The most striking example of this is the case of Edward Gosynhill, who wrote both in praise and dispraise of women. His motives may have been simply commercial, and it may be noted that the hostile *Scholehouse of Women* had three editions between 1541 and 1572, whereas the sympathetic *Mulierum Pean* appeared twice.⁷ Gosynhill may have written for money

⁵ John Aylmer, *An Harborow for faithful subjects*, (1559), for example sig. B3. See Amanda Shepherd, *Gender and Authority* (Keele 1994) for a discussion of the debate on Knox.

⁶ Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, ed. Albert R. Rabil, (Chicago 1996) p. 10; Agrippa first wrote his treatise in 1509 at the age of 23, and Margaret Somerville suggests that it was written as an exercise to show off his rhetorical skill. Margaret R. Somerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes to Women in Early-Modern Society* (London 1995) p. 34 n. 3

⁷ A. W. Pollard & G.R. Redgrave eds., with revisions by W.A. Jackson, F.S. Ferguson & K.F. Panzer) *A Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England* . . . hereafter S.T.C. (London 1976 - 1991) vol. 1 p. 352; *Scole house of women: S.T.C.* nos 12104.5 (1541); 12105 (1560); 12107 (1572); *Mulierum paeon: S.T.C.* nos.

rather than for conviction, but there was a sufficient commercial market for both points of view.

Bearing in mind then that we are looking at stereotypes and not necessarily the real views of the writers, it is possible to explore what the stereotypes of 'woman', her nature and her position were, as manifested by this group of writers, all apparently male, in the first sixty years of the sixteenth century. The medieval and early Christian view of woman as temptress is still much in evidence in the focusing of so many of the writers on Eve. Eve is used in two contexts, those of the Creation and of the Fall, but in both cases her example is used to prove or to justify woman's divinely instituted inferiority to man.

The Creation of Eve provoked many ingenious and contradictory opinions. This group of writers all took a strictly literal view of the Genesis accounts. The creation of Eve from Adam's rib was interpreted by Erasmus as indicating that God intended Eve to be man's closest companion.

[Eve was made] out of the rybbes of Adam, wherby it is to be understood that nothyng ought to be more dere to us then ye wyfe, nothing more conioyned, nothing more faste glued unto us ⁸

Bullinger, in *The Christen State of Matrimony*, took a similar view, adding that Eve's creation out of Adam's rib, not out of the earth, showed that no man 'shulde thinke that he had gotten his wife out of the myre'. Bullinger hints here at an equality between man and woman, at least in the eyes of God ⁹ Agrippa took this several stages further. For him man and woman were not equal, woman was superior. Woman, as the last of God's creation, was the most perfect of the creatures, marking the 'conclusion and end' of God's work in creation.¹⁰

There was also considerable discussion of the exact significance of woman being made from Adam's rib, rather than from some other part of his anatomy. This might mean that she was to be man's companion and helpmeet. Coming from his rib, she was not to be spurned by man as she might have been if she were made from his foot, but perhaps more importantly she was not set above man to be his superior, as

12102 (1542 ?); 12103 (1557 ?).

⁸ Erasmus, *A right fruteful Epystle . . . in Laude and Prayse of matrimony*, translated by Richard Tavener (c. 1532) sig. A v v.

⁹ Heinrich Bullinger, trans. William Coverdale *The Christen State of Matrimonye* (London 1541) [no pagination]

¹⁰ Agrippa, *On the Nobilitye of womankind*, sig. A iii v.

she would have been if she came from his head. Her dependence on him was emphasised both by Bullinger who said that as Adam gave his bone to Eve, so the husband should be the 'strength helpe and comferte of the wife'¹¹ and also by Knox.¹²

Eve's creation from Adam's rib could be variously interpreted then to mean she was man's equal companion or his dependent inferior, but it was a morally neutral question, with no suggestion of blame or punishment. Her role in the Fall of man was very different. At its most extreme, this could lead to a modern feminist historian writing

Among the possible meanings of a woman's life in early modern Europe the most shocking was that she could stand for all that was utterly evil. By nature, because she was female, she was eligible for this role.¹³

The writers considered here were not discussing witchcraft, the context of the comment just quoted, but those who took a hostile view of woman's nature repeated the traditional view of the sin and punishment of Eve, and if they did not see woman as utterly evil, they considered her vices far outweighed her virtues. Knox took a hard line, quoting the strictures of Tertullian for whom woman was 'the porte and gate of the devil' and the 'first transgressor of goddes law', deceiving Adam when the serpent feared to do so. The author of the *Deceyte of Women* combines the blame for Eve's sin with an insult to woman's character. The Devil seeking to make Adam disobey God, thought it would be easier to tempt Eve because 'the woman . . . is of much febler nature to withstande temptacion'¹⁴

However the conventional view of Eve's culpability, eternally punished by woman's suffering in childbirth, was not without challenge from these writers. Agrippa argued that because God had specifically forbidden Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but had not specifically forbidden Eve, Adam was a sinner but Eve was not. It was Adam, not Eve, who was responsible for original sin. Agrippa simply ignored the problem of woman's suffering in travail when he made this comment.¹⁵ Vaughan's *Dialogue defensyve for women* also discussed the issue of Eve's culpability, but Vaughan used his characters the Falcon and the Pie to air different opinions. The hostile magpie claimed that Eve's daughters, since her fall,

¹¹ *Deceyte* sig. Aiii ; Bullinger, *Christen State of Matrimony*, chapter 1

¹² Knox, *First Blast*, f. 21r.

¹³ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze*, (San Francisco 1994) p.11

¹⁴ Knox, *First Blast* f.18 r.; *Deceyte* sig. Aii v.

¹⁵ Agrippa, *Of the Nobility of womankind*, sig.C v.

had maintained all sin and vice and were insatiable for carnal pleasures (another of the medieval stereotypes of women) to which they continued to tempt men. The Falcon, supporting women, argued on the contrary that Adam and Eve sinned equally at the Fall. Men, he suggested, provided the first examples of sinners: Cain was the first murderer, Noah the first drunkard. Moreover, he claimed triumphantly, redemption came to mankind by 'the son of a Maid'.¹⁶

This assertion by the Falcon leads us to the second of the stereotypes: woman as Mary, the embodiment of virtue. There are some specific references to Mary here. Agrippa says that she is the best of all womankind, and greatly exceeds the best of men, John the Baptist. Gosynhill, in *Mulierum Pean*, reminds his readers

Admytte then that woman fyrste offended
The man persuadynge to trangress
A woman was she , the faute that amendeth
By means of her great humbleness¹⁷

In other cases the authors while not necessarily naming Mary, give extravagant praise to women, idealising them as they would idealise Mary. Agrippa's *On the Nobility of womankind* is perhaps the best example of this. For Agrippa, as noted above, woman is the most perfect of God's creatures. He claimed that this is shown by her beauty, which he described appreciatively. Moreover she has been equipped with a natural modesty, shown by the internal nature of her privy parts, which unlike a man she does not have to handle in 'the works of nature'.¹⁸ This emphasis on her modesty is of course in direct opposition to the more usual view of woman's lustfulness, which may account for the extravagance with which he makes his point.

Agrippa praised other facets of woman's nature. Christ's women followers were more steadfast than their male colleagues, and after the resurrection Christ appeared first to women.¹⁹ Woman, for Agrippa, excelled in all fields. She could be orator, prophet, teacher, philosopher, judge, builder of cities. Agrippa was aware of course of the paradox he was citing. Virtually all his examples of women fulfilling

¹⁶ Robert Vaughan, *A Dialogue defensyve for women against malycyous detractoures*, (1542) sigs. B iii r., D iv r.

¹⁷ Edward Gosynhill, *The prayse of all women, called Mulierum Pean* (1540) sig. Biii r.

¹⁸ Agrippa claimed (in woman's favour) that she is so modest that if she has a disease in her privy parts she would choose to die rather than to be handled by the surgeon. Agrippa, *Nobility of Womankind*, sig. B iiiii r.

¹⁹ Agrippa, *Nobility of Womankind*, sig. C v.

these roles came from the classical world or the Bible.²⁰ With such a high opinion of woman, Agrippa found himself in an embarrassing position when it came to the women of his own day. He accepted that they were not given higher education, were not permitted to be judges, advocates or preachers. He accepted that women were constrained to obey men, but this was not by divine law, he believed, but merely by 'custome, education fortune and a certayne tyrannicall occasion'.²¹ Returning implicitly to the role of Mary he reminded his readers that Christ's redemption of humanity meant woman need no longer be subject to Eve's punishment.²²

Edward Gosynhill, in the *Mulierum Pean*, did not go as far as Agrippa in praising women, but used some of the same Biblical examples: Judith, Miriam, the women in the Garden of Gethsemane, showing how God's grace to women revealed their virtues. More prosaically, he gave word pictures of woman as nurse to her husband and as tireless mother to her child.

Whan ye lye syke and lyke to dye / Who than attendeth you unto
Were nat the woman, there might ye lye Donge in your denne, as bestes do .

If that your fynger other hede ake / Or elles what ayleth you, hande or fote
There can no medycyne the payne aslake Without the woman be your bote
Lappe you warme in clothes softe A kercheyffe binde unto your hedde
And in her armes bere you to bedde . . .²³

The man may lye and snowre full fast / What that the wyfe must watch and
wake
Out of the bed her armes cast The cradell to rocke tyll they both ake
The babe also unto her take And when he is unclene beneth
Must be content with many ill breth . . .
Thus hathe the mother all the care / All the labour and dyssease
Where as the father doth what hym please . . .²⁴

This picture is so lifelike, even to the baby's smelly nappy, that it would seem likely to be based on personal experience, and brings agreeable light relief to Gosynhill's rather ponderous verse.

²⁰ Agrippa, *Nobility of Womankind*, sigs. D ii v.; D iii r.; E iv v.; E v v.

²¹ Constance Jordan suggests that Agrippa's use of the word 'tyrannical' means that it was against divine law for a husband to deny rights to his wife, since the husband was under divine law, not outside the law like a tyrant. Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, (Ithaca 1990) p.125

²² Agrippa, *Nobility of Womankind* sigs. F iii v.; G v.

²³ Edward Gosynhill, *The prayse of all women called Mulierum Pean* (1540) sig. A iii v.

²⁴ Gosynhill, *Mulierum Pean* sig. B iv v. [labelled thus but actually B i v.]

Mary served not simply as an ideal but also a role model. Her example was held up before women as a mother and wife, but one who fulfilled these roles in unassailable virgin purity. This example was used for instance by Juan Luis Vives in his very influential *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*.²⁵ Vives shaped his book around the woman's life cycle, and this is particularly useful for us when Vives deals with the part of her life while she is still a girl, since he devotes far more of his attention to girlhood than do other writers.

As a Spanish humanist, Vives turned for patronage to the Spanish-born Queen of England, Catherine of Aragon. Catherine may not have taken the major decisions concerning her daughter Mary's education,²⁶ but nonetheless she asked her new protegee Vives to write a handbook on the education of women, with the princess as its inspiration. *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* was first published in Latin in 1523 and was translated into English by Richard Hyrde before 1528, as *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*. Although Vives wrote with a princess in mind, his book did not restrict itself to the education of princesses, and became very popular, being reprinted eight times within the sixteenth century. It was not the only contemporary book to deal with a woman's youth and education, but it was the most important.

After its popularity in the sixteenth century, Vives' book languished in obscurity for several hundred years. In 1912 Foster Watson published long extracts from it in his book *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Woman*.²⁷ Watson presented a picture of Vives as a liberal humanist with advanced views on the education of women, ideas that were in keeping with the well known examples of highly educated Tudor women such as Margaret More (later Roper), Lady Jane Grey, and Queen Elizabeth herself. This was the view of Vives that prevailed²⁸ until feminist historians from the late 1970s onwards began to consider more of Vives' text than the sections anthologised by Watson. This has led to recent descriptions of

²⁵ Juan Luis Vives, trans Richard Hyrde *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (London c. 1528. The 1541 edition is used for references here.) sigs.E r., Pii r.

²⁶ David Loades, *Mary Tudor* (Oxford 1989) p.32

²⁷ Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women* (London 1912)

²⁸ See for example Doris Mary Stenton, *The English Woman in History*. (London 1957), p. 123

Vives' work as misogynistic and as 'such an objectionable treatise'.²⁹ From the viewpoint of late twentieth century feminists these comments are understandable, but it is of course important to remember the context in which Vives was writing. *The Instruction of the Christian Woman* is a major source for this chapter. Despite his title, Vives does not limit himself to education, but discusses all the stages of a woman's life from infancy to old age. His book provides the central thread running through the rest of this chapter

For Vives the greatest gift a woman had was her chastity, and under no circumstances must she imperil it. It could be argued that in opposition to those who believed that woman was inherently evil, the heiress of Eve, Vives was one of the 'woman as Mary' school of thought. This is going further than is justified. Vives believed that woman could and should be chaste, but her chastity was subject to many threats. Her whole life, from the cradle onwards, must be designed to protect her chastity against these threats and dangers, threats that lurked in hidden, or in attractive, places, and which the girl might not be able to perceive herself. This explains why Vives began his advice to parents with what might seem extraordinary advice to watch their infant daughter 'lest any spot of vyce or unclenlynes shulde stycke on her' ³

Vives firmly rejects the view that children should be exposed to both good and evil, in order to make an informed choice for good. In his opinion children who were not old enough to know the difference between good and evil should not be exposed to evil, since they could make the wrong choice. Similarly Vives advised parents that they should not allow any deliberate or inadvertent misbehaviour by their young daughter, nor should they encourage the child who was perhaps charmingly naughty. They should 'allowe none uncomely dede by her, neyther by wordes laughynge nor countenance', and should on no account praise or kiss the child who had performed such an 'uncomely dede'.³¹

²⁹ Gloria Kaufman, "Juan Luis Vives and the Education of Women", *Signs*, vol. 3 no.4 (1978) pp. 891-96; Joan Larsen Klein, *Daughters, Wives and Widows*, (Urbana 1992), V Beauchamp, M. Mikesel, & B. Travitsky, "The Privatization of women in conduct books: Vives' Instruction as a case study" in B Travitsky and A Seeff eds., *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, Newark N. J. 1994

³⁰ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. Bi v.

³¹ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. B v.

A potential cause of sin, even in the young girl, was idleness. At least partly for this reason Vives believed that all girls should learn certain domestic skills, and gave his proposals for their domestic education. Spinning was required for all women, even, he stressed, for those who would be queens. This is one of the few direct references in the book to the Princess Mary. He justified this odd demand by referring to the ancient Roman custom of brides bringing spindle and distaff to the marital home.³² As well as spinning, Vives considered that all girls should be able to cook. His aristocratic readers might be revolted by the messy aspects of cooking, getting their hands sooty from the kitchen fire for example, but he still insisted that they should learn. The well run kitchen was 'a thing most necessary, without the which neither sicke folkes can amend, nor hole folkes lyve'. The actual cooking might be carried out by servants, but Vives noted quite reasonably that a knowledgeable mistress in the kitchen would mean that 'all thinge is done the more dylygently'.³³ It should be noted that cooking was not considered a gendered occupation at this time. Tusser urges the wife to cook for her menfolk at the busy times of the farming year, to give good cheer to the neighbours. In the great households though most servants, including cooks, were male. *A propre new booke of cokery* of 1545 is addressed to 'all that delighteth in cookery' with no comment about the sex of the readers.³⁴ Vives' domestic ideas were shared by Bullinger, who advised that a father should not arrange his daughter's marriage until he had personal experience of her housewifery.³⁵ Like Vives with his remark about hands dirtied by cooking, Bullinger realised that some girls would complain about the effect of housework on their hands. He used this to make a moralising point and urged them to believe, as he did, that rough, work-worn hands are more attractive than hands 'glistening' with rings or wearing smooth gloves.³⁶

³² Vives, *Instruction*, sig. B iv r. The Italian Lodovic Dolce made the same point about queens learning to spin in his *Dialogo della institutione delle donne* of 1545, but he may have been influenced by Vives here. Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, p. 70

³³ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. C r.

³⁴ Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (London 1744 edition) June 4; R. Lant and R. Bankes, *A propre new booke of cokery* (1545)

³⁵ It was the mothers' task to teach their daughters the techniques of spinning, sewing and weaving.

³⁶ Heinrich Bullinger, *The Christen State of Matrimony*, trans. William Coverdale (1541) chapter 24 [no pagination]

Vives might talk first about domestic education, but this is the least significant part of his section on the upbringing of the girl. Far more important are his views on the academic education of the young woman. These views have caused Vives' work to be considered revolutionary by some writers. The humanist writers of the early sixteenth century were much concerned with education, both for boys and girls, but the question of the academic education of girls was a particularly significant issue.³⁷ All educated men assumed that education, in practice education based on the classics, was desirable for men of the ruling classes. Latin had been the essential tool of scholars since the early middle ages, and Greek had become significant for the most erudite with the Renaissance. Reading was the essential skill for studying the classic authors, and writing was necessary for the communication of knowledge. Literacy, to the humanists, meant above all the ability to read and write in Latin. For males, this could be taken for granted. Did women, though, need these skills?

There had always been some women who had received a Latinate education. Heloise wrote to Abelard in Latin, Hildegarde of Bingen wrote her poetry in Latin. In the middle ages these were the exceptions. Christine de Pisan, who was the first professional woman writer, while 'exceptionally well-educated' and very well read, did not understand Latin.³⁸ The deeply pious patroness of education and of publishing, Lady Margaret Beaufort, could read only enough Latin to understand the headings of the service books, though she claimed that she had neglected her studies of the language when she was a girl.³⁹ With humanism however some men began to see the advantages of a Latinate education for girls. The most famous example of this is Sir Thomas More, himself of course a distinguished humanist scholar, who decided to extend this privilege to his daughters. Margaret More and her sisters were given an exceptional education, sufficiently exceptional for them to be cited as examples by

³⁷ See e.g. Alice T. Friedman, 'The Influence of Humanism on the Education of Girls and Boys in Tudor England' *History of Education Quarterly* 25 (1985); Linda Pollock 'Teach her to live under obedience: the making of women in the upper ranks of early modern England' *Continuity and Change* 4 (1989); J.K. Sowards, 'Erasmus and the Education of Women' *Sixteenth Century Journal* vol 13 no. 4 (1982)

³⁸ Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: a history of women in the Middle Ages* (London 1983) pp.157-8

³⁹ M. K. Jones and M. G. Underwood, *The King's Mother* (Cambridge 1992) p.184

Vives and Erasmus.⁴⁰ Other fathers saw the wisdom of educating their daughters as they would educate their sons. The four daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, the two daughters of King Henry VIII, and Lady Jane Grey, were all given a classical education.

These are brilliant examples, and because the early sixteenth century is a period when these educated women were well known, and even in positions of power, there has been a tendency for the typicality of the educated woman to be overestimated. Certainly the example of Lady Jane Grey, whose parents do not seem to have been sympathetic to her scholarly aspirations, shows that education for girls was fashionable, and perhaps in Jane's case considered suitable to equip her for possible high office.⁴¹ However, there were in fact very few women who received the sort of education shared by Jane Grey and the More sisters. A detailed study by Retha Warnicke shows about sixty women who are known to have received a classical education in the sixteenth century. This number may seem considerable, but the statutes for just one school, Colet's St Paul's, specified 153 places, and that number was at times exceeded.⁴² Most better off parents wished to educate their sons, but there seems to have been substantially less demand for a classical education for their daughters

None the less, it was a classical education that Vives discussed. He felt it necessary to justify himself, and gave various examples of women whose virtue had been enhanced by their education. Following the usual pattern of the period, he included classical and Biblical examples and the more up to date Hildegard, 'a mayde of Almayne' probably Hildegard of Bingen, who was also commended by Agrippa More surprisingly Vives also gave modern examples, the four daughters of 'quene Isabell', in other words his patroness Catherine of Aragon and her sisters, and the

⁴⁰ J.K. Sowards, 'Erasmus and the Education of Women' *Sixteenth Century Journal* vol. 13 (1982) p.83

⁴¹ The famous tale of Jane Grey preferring to remain at home reading Greek while her parents were hunting in the park was told by Roger Ascham in *The Schoolmaster*, quoted by D. M. Stenton, *The English Woman in History* (London 1957) p.123

⁴² Retha M. Warnicke, "Women and Humanism in England" in Albert Rabil, ed. *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Form and Legacy* (Philadelphia 1988) p.39. Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England*, (Cambridge 1966) pp. 74, 95

daughters of 'S. T. M. kn', that is the More family.⁴³ All were praised for their virtue, and Vives insisted that 'we shall fynde no lerned woman that ever was yll, where I coude brynge forth an hundred good'.⁴⁴

There was some concern among scholars whether girls had the mental capacity to benefit by education, though parents who valued education in general, seem to have been prepared to educate daughters as well as sons. The substance of the education may of course have been different.⁴⁵ Sir Thomas More himself used a somewhat unflattering image when he said that a woman's brain was 'of its own nature bad', more suitable to bear fern than corn. None the less, he said, education was justified because if 'a woman's wit is the more diligently by good instructions and learning to be manured' then 'the defect of nature may be redressed by industry'.⁴⁶ The fifteenth century woman writer Christine de Pisan, in a book that became available in English in 1521, had disputed that there was any defect of nature. Christine argued that the only thing wrong with girls was that they did not have the educational opportunities given to boys. If they had the chance, she wrote 'they sholde lerne as parfytely and they sholde be as wel entred in to the subtyltes of all the artes and scyences as they [i e boys] be'⁴⁷

Richard Hyrde, the translator into English of Vives' *Instruction*, writing an introduction to Margaret Roper's translation of Erasmus's *Precatio dominica in septem portiones distributa*, used practical reasons for approving of the education of women. Reading, he said, occupied the mind. While the woman was engaged in 'handworks, that men say be more meet for a woman' she was in fact at greater risk of improper thoughts, for 'the body may be busy in one place, and the mind walking in another'. This would not happen while she was reading 'She that will be good, learning shall cause her to be much better'.⁴⁸

⁴³ Vives, *Instruction* sig. C ii r.; Agrippa, *The Nobility of Women* sig. E iv v.

⁴⁴ Vives, *Instruction* sig. Cii r.

⁴⁵ Norma McMullen 'The Education of English Gentlewomen 1540-1640' p.90; Linda Pollock 'Teach her to live under obedience' p. 239

⁴⁶ Cresacre More, "The Life of Sir Thomas More", in Foster Watson ed. *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, (London 1912) pp.179 - 180

⁴⁷ Christine de Pisan, *Here begynneth the Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes*, trans. Bryan Ansley, (1521) sig. Kk v r.

⁴⁸ Richard Hyrde, "Introduction to Margaret Roper's translation of Erasmus", in Foster Watson *op cit*, p.167

Learning for women might be justified in terms of the possibilities it presented for moral improvement, but Vives was well aware of the dangers that could accompany unregulated study, and he established firm rules for the girl's education. Her teacher should ideally be 'a holy and well-learned woman'.⁴⁹ Failing a suitable woman the parents should employ an elderly man, or in default of anyone more appropriate a younger, very virtuous man married to a pretty wife, so he would not be subject to temptation. The More girls, Jane Grey and Elizabeth Tudor in fact all had male tutors

In the early modern period the skills of reading and writing were taught independently, with reading being taught first. It was theoretically possible for someone therefore to learn to read but not to write. Writing was a practical skill, but it was also seen as an art especially by humanists. For Vives though writing practice was to be used as an opportunity to learn 'some sad sentence, prudent and chaste', rather than to develop an idiosyncratic signature. Again the moral purpose of all education for Vives is made evident.

This becomes even more apparent when reading is considered. Vives devoted a chapter of his work to recommendations on reading, both prescriptive and proscriptive. His list of proscriptions makes clear the kind of books young women left to themselves might choose to read: romances. The tales of such heroes as Amadis of Gaul, Guy of Warwick and Lancelot du Lac were not, Vives stressed, suitable to be read by girls. He ridiculed stories of superhuman feats by romantic heroes and considered that romances contained nothing but war and love, neither of which were fit matters for girls.⁵⁰ In the eyes of the Christian humanists romances glamorised war, and the hero-figures of the romances could be seen all too easily as tyrants.⁵¹ The 'love' aspects of the romance, even the mere concept of courtly love, tended to be seen by the strict moralists as little more than a similar glamorisation of

⁴⁹ It should be noted that Vives is inconsistent here and later specifically says that women should not teach. See below p.26

⁵⁰ Vives' condemnation of the romance expressed a typically humanist view. Erasmus forbade the tales of Arthur and Lancelot when discussing the education of the Christian prince. Bullinger also advised that while girls might occupy their time in reading, they should not read 'fables' of 'fond or light love' Heinrich Bullinger, *The Christen State of Matrimony*, trans William Coverdale chapter 24 [no pagination]

⁵¹ Robert P. Adams, *The better part of valor: More Erasmus Colet and Vives on humanism, war and peace 1496-1535* (Seattle 1962) pp. 223-7

adultery. The love stories of Lancelot, or of Tristan and Iseult were after all adulterous relationships even if disguised as romantic passion. For similar moral reasons Vives very firmly forbade any girl to read the writings of Ovid, especially his 'books of love' which were to be avoided as if they were serpents. He even suggested that a girl who persisted in reading Ovid should be prevented from reading anything at all.⁵²

Despite humanist condemnation, romances continued to be popular with readers, if perhaps with readers who had received a less elevated education than Vives described. In the later sixteenth century many romances were published, and the writers John Lyly and Robert Greene deliberately wrote 'romance [set] in strange opera lands and love stories with happy endings' for women readers.⁵³ It has been suggested that the authors somewhat disdained their female readers, and included separate dedications to male and females, but that none the less these books were popular with both sexes. Most of these romances were written by men, though in 1578 Margaret Tyler published *The Mirror of Knighthood*, a translation from a Spanish original. She defended herself in her preface, claiming that by translating rather than writing an original work she was not having to show an unfeminine amount of inventiveness. Tyler's comments also make clear that even fifty years after Vives, the romance was still regarded as morally somewhat dubious, even if it was popular.⁵⁴

After his proscriptions, Vives gave his recommended book list. He would encourage the girl to read the Old Testament and most of the New, fathers of the church such as Jerome, Ciprian, Augustine and Ambrose, and classical writers such as Plato, Cicero, Seneca 'and such other'. This seems a very solid reading list for girls perhaps barely into their teens, though contemporary lists for boys were quite similar. Boys however were permitted to read in order to gain good writing style, or indeed even to read for interest. Writing on the education of boys, Vives recommended that

⁵² Vives, *Instruction* sigs. D iii r. - D iv r.

⁵³ Louis B. Wright, *Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (London 1964) p.110

⁵⁴ Helen Hackett, 'Yet tell me some such fiction: lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* and the feminity of romance' in Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss, eds *Women Texts and Histories 1575 - 1760* (London 1992) pp. 39-42, 44-45; Tina Krontiris, 'Breaking barriers of genre and gender: Margaret Tyler's translation of the *Mirroure of Knighthood*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 18 (1988) pp.19 - 39

modern historians such as Froissart or Philippe de Comines be read as well as the classical writers such as Tacitus or Xenophon. He gave no such recommendations for girls.⁵⁵ Instead, Vives emphasised that girls must not trust their own judgement. A girl who became bored with the approved book list, or began to develop ideas of her own, must discuss these ideas with 'wise and sad men', and take their advice. If she did not, she was in grave danger for she would mistake 'false for true, hurtful insted of holsome, folysshe and pevysshe for sad and wise'.⁵⁶

Vives encouraged education for women, then, but to what purpose? There was no question in Vives' mind that a woman might lead a public life (queens of course excepted). A woman could learn 'for herself alone', for the private satisfaction she would gain from her learning. She might also learn for the sake of her children, so that she could be a better mother and supervise her children's upbringing and education more effectively, or she might learn so she could share her knowledge with 'her systers in our lorde' if she was a nun. She must not 'rule a schole, nor to lyve amonge men, or speke abrode'. Vives applied the prohibition of St Paul on women speaking in church, to mean that women could not speak on any kind of public occasion. To do so was to lose her 'demureness and honesty'. Despite having said earlier that the best teacher for a girl was a chaste and learned woman, at this point in his book Vives claimed that women were not at all suitable to teach, because they might have obtained false opinions. The authority that the position of teacher gave a woman would allow her to spread those false opinions. Vives simply ignored the possibility of a man doing the same thing. It is this kind of attitude that has made recent feminist historians deeply distrustful of Vives and his intentions.

Although Vives concentrated on classical education, as we have seen very few women in fact received this, or the education in philosophy that Elyot's Zenobia claimed to have enjoyed.⁵⁷ For most women, if they received education at all it would be a vernacular education. The assessment of this is difficult. Only where women wrote something that has been preserved, can we be certain that they were literate, and statistics of literacy have normally been based on signatures, which measure only

⁵⁵ Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* (Cambridge 1979) p.112

⁵⁶ Vives *Instruction* sig. D iv r.

⁵⁷ Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Defence of Good Women*, in Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women* (London 1912) p. 234

the basic ability to write (and do not measure reading ability at all). However on the basis of signatures it has been estimated that fewer than ten per cent of women could write in the sixteenth century (although of course this figure is an average and the figures are higher in certain places and among certain social groups).⁵⁸ According to David Cressy's statistics from several English dioceses, women taken as a group were more likely to be illiterate than any male group except labourers. Figures for reading are even more difficult to estimate, and lists of books from inventories are not necessarily good indicators, since people may have possessed books without being able to read them (if they were inherited for example). Nor do inventories always give the titles of books. However it has recently been suggested from details of horn books published, that at least in the seventeenth century a high proportion of the population may have had access to the simplest kinds of reading material.⁵⁹

The evidence from the small group of women studied in detail for this thesis suggests that a possibly fairly basic vernacular literacy was not uncommon among women from the higher social classes. There is clear evidence that Sabine Johnson could write, and there are signed letters from Lady Northumberland, Lady Rochford, and Mrs Clarencius, as well as evidence of Lady Lisle practising her signature. However only Sabine Johnson of this group actually wrote her own letters, illustrating another problem of the evidence. It was not unusual for those who could afford it to have a secretary to write their letters, so that we do not know for instance whether Lady Northumberland, who signed one letter that is preserved, would have been capable of writing more than simply her signature. Sabine Johnson's erratic handwriting and spelling, and that of Catherine Howard in a letter written to her lover, and obviously in her own hand, suggest that for many women literacy was a matter of function rather than of art or scholarship. Writing for function made no statement about woman's position, but writing for other purposes did. Woman's right to express herself was severely restricted. There were three traditional virtues for

⁵⁸ Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500 - 1760: a social history* (London 1994) p.166; David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, (Cambridge 1980) p.144 shows for example that in the 1580s 100% of his sample of Norfolk and Suffolk women were unable to write, compared with 84% of London women.

⁵⁹ Helen Weinstein, *Spinning with the Brain: Women as readers and writers in seventeenth century England* (unpublished paper, Women's History Network Conference, London, September 1996)

women: chastity, silence and obedience. 'Silence' could be seen as a prohibition on gossip, but it also applied to writing. Talkativeness was not a vice that greatly concerned the advice writers studied here, although both Erasmus and Gosynhill did seize the opportunity to repeat a popular anecdote about this. A man had a dumb wife, and took the advice offered by a stranger to lay aspen leaves under her tongue while she slept. Aspen leaves proverbially swayed and rustled in the slightest wind. When she woke, the woman could talk, and her first words were to blame her husband for waking her. Needless to say the husband soon tired of his wife's endless nagging, and on meeting the stranger again, begged for another medicine, this time to silence his wife. The stranger now revealed that he was a devil, but only a minor one. Alas, he told the husband, neither he nor any of the devils in hell had the power to prevent a woman speaking once she had begun. Curiously Gosynhill felt able to repeat this misogynistic anecdote in both his *Scholehouse*, criticising women, and his *Mulierum Pean*, praising them, though in the *Pean* he followed this with a rebuttal of its main point ⁶⁰

'Silence' meant that those few women who were scholars did not have the same freedom of expression as their male counterparts, quite apart from not being able to earn their livings professionally by scholarship, as Erasmus and Vives could do ⁶¹ Margaret Hannay has shown that English women were only permitted to express themselves by religious writing, not by secular work, but even this might require some defence or justification.⁶² Committing her writing to print offended against the desirable virtue of silence, and might even be seen as impugning a woman's chastity. Sir Thomas More for example was reluctant to allow his daughter Margaret's translations to be published. When Anne Cooke's translations of Bernardino Ochino's sermons were published, the anonymous preface described how, 'for shamefastnes'

⁶⁰ Gosynhill, *Scholehouse of Women*, sigs. C v. - Ci r.; *Mulierum Pean* sig Bii r.; Erasmus, *A mery dialogue . . . of shrowde shrewes and honest wyves*, sig C. iv r.

⁶¹ Christine de Pisan, who was able to support herself and her children by writing, in fifteenth century France, had no equivalent in early sixteenth century England. But Christine was conscious of being an outsider as a studious woman, and described herself as having 'un coeur d'homme'. Susan Gloag Bell, 'Christine de Pisan: humanism and the possibility of a studious woman', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 3 no. 3-4 (1976)

⁶² Margaret P. Hannay ed., *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent, Ohio 1988) pp. 1 - 4

Anne would have preferred to suppress them. The writer also apologised for any faults in the translation, on the grounds that it was a woman's work. It should be noted that while the publisher expressed what were felt to be suitable sentiments regarding a woman's modesty about her literary endeavours, Anne Cooke's own dedication to her mother, while recognising possible weaknesses in the translation, did not acknowledge that it was inappropriate for a woman to publish her work.⁶³

When the friends of Catherine Parr, including the Duchess of Suffolk, decided to publish her *Lamentations of a Sinner*, they had a preface written which gave fulsome praise of her virtue, and especially of her humility and religious zeal. Advice was given to ladies who might wish to emulate her, that they should follow her in virtue, and like her they should 'be honorable in religion' who were now 'honorable in vanyties' so that they might 'taste the freedom of the remission of this everlasting blisse'⁶⁴ No suggestion was made that they might also follow the queen's example in setting their thoughts on paper for posterity. Catherine however was sufficiently moved by her religious convictions to go beyond discretion in her writing, for the *Lamentation* is 'an almost aggressive piece of proselytizing' on behalf of evangelical views.⁶⁵ King Henry had encouraged the education of his daughters, but he would surely have been reluctant to permit any woman, let alone his wife, to break her 'silence' in this way, and indeed the *Lamentation* was not published until after Henry's death. A few years earlier the King had approved an act of parliament which severely restricted the rights of women (among other groups of lay people) to read and study the scriptures, classing women as a sex among those who could not be trusted with free access to divine knowledge.⁶⁶ Education for women, then, was commendable, but the education of girls was to be more restricted than that of boys, and the use that women could make of their education was more circumscribed.

The parents' next duty, after seeing to their daughter's education, was to prepare her for marriage. Here as might be expected the advice writers had much to

⁶³ *Sermons of Bernardino Ochino concerning the predestination and election of God. Translated out Italian into our native tongue by A.C.* (London ?1570) sigs. Aiii v. - Aiiij v.

⁶⁴ Queen Catherine Parr, *Lamentation of a Sinner*, (London 1547) preface (no pagination)

⁶⁵ David Loades, *The Politics of Marriage: Henry VIII and his Queens* (Stroud 1994) p.154

⁶⁶ 34-35 Hen. VIII c. 1. See below p. 87

say. The domestic side of her education formed part of this preparation. There was also need for the preparation of her character, to make the young woman into a potential good wife. Since the good wife's greatest adornment was her chastity, this aspect of a girl's upbringing was stressed. Chastity could be considered the great theme of Vives' book, and he insists that the girl's life must be conducted in such a way as to avoid any risk to this precious jewel. Her virginity was 'a treasure without comparison', and as a traditional Catholic Vives reminded young girls that a virgin was especially prized by Christ, and indeed a life of virgin dedication to Christ was the best life a woman could lead. However realistically the princess Mary, for whom he was writing, would not be able to spend her life in a convent, so he advised girls how to protect their virginity until marriage.⁶⁷

The best way to do this, Vives considered, was for the girl to lead a carefully sequestered life. She should be prevented from hearing, seeing or thinking 'any foule thyng' ⁶⁸ Ideally Vives would have the girl spend all her time at home, in the company of her mother or a suitable chaperone. The mother should not take the girl with her when she leaves the house, unless she was going somewhere that will present no threat to the girl's chastity. The real problems came with such social occasions as feasts, banquets and dinners. Vives realised that girls in the social circles he was writing for, would sometimes be obliged to attend such gatherings, but he warned sternly of the dangers they presented. A girl's behaviour and conversation would be noted, with subsequent risks for her reputation.⁶⁹

Another most perilous risk came from dancing. Bullinger advised that dancing should be avoided, together with other 'unhonest games and passe tymes'.⁷⁰ Vives was much more alarmed at the prospect. Dancing, to Vives, meant 'shakyng and bragging and unclenly handlynges gropynges and kyssynges and a very kendlyng of lechery'. Girls were held in men's arms so they could 'hop' all the higher in the dance movements. Dancing involving girls and young men, was a paradigm of sex, with 'movyng and gesture' that revealed 'the operation of those partes' which nature and decency would keep hidden. Even if there was no dancing, Vives believed there was

⁶⁷ Vives, *Instruction*, sigs. E r., E ii v, E iii r.

⁶⁸ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. F ii r. Vives, *Instruction*, sigs. L ii r., L ii v.

⁶⁹ Vives, *Instruction*, sigs. L ii r., L ii v.

⁷⁰ Bullinger, *Christen State of Matrimony*, chapter 24

danger in conversation between young men and girls, a danger like that of putting fire and kindling next to each other.⁷¹

Once the young girl had been appropriately educated, including a domestic education, and her chastity protected, arrangements could be made for her marriage. The word 'arrangements' is used advisedly. In both the ideal world of the advice writers, and the real world of elite families, marriages were arranged. There was no question of a young man and a young woman deciding for themselves that they wished to marry, for love alone. Marriage was a contract made between families, and symbolised by the sometimes complex financial settlements made. The advice writers were somewhat ambivalent about this. Agrippa condemned the grasping attitude shown by some parents when investigating potential spouses for their offspring, and urged men to 'let love be the cause, not substance of goods, chose a wyfe not a garment, let thy wyfe be marryed unto the, not her dowrye'⁷² Vives however regarded 'love' as like a wild beast, to be feared. By love here Vives seems to mean sexual attraction, which is probably not what Agrippa means

Parental consent was stressed by all those who considered marriage. Vives addressing himself directly to the girl, told her that she should expect that her parents would provide a better husband for her, not a worse, than she might find for herself, and advised her to help her parents by praying that they would give her a husband who would 'provoke, exhorte and helpe her' towards virtuous living.⁷³ Bullinger emphasised that both divine and civil law required the parents' consent for marriage of those under age.⁷⁴ In fact Bullinger was wrong about this since in the eyes of both church and state a marriage without parental consent was perfectly legal provided the young couple were of legal age, while parental consent did not in itself validate a marriage of those under age. A marriage without the parents' consent might be seen as clandestine but it remained lawful, though as Lawrence Stone says, parents did have the 'power of the purse' at their disposal.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Vives, *Instruction*, sigs. N ii r. - N iii v.; M r.

⁷² Agrippa, *Commendation of matrimony*, trans. David Clapham (1534) C vi v

⁷³ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. P ii v.

⁷⁴ Bullinger, *The Christen State of Matrimony*, chapter 5

⁷⁵ Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce*, (Oxford 1990) pp. 53-58 For a further discussion of marriage law, see below Chapter Three especially pp. 70-73

Bullinger did though urge parents to be reasonable. It is their duty to marry their children 'in the meane season'. If they fail to do this, he warns, they cannot blame the young people if they act on their own initiative, for the father has lost his authority by his unreasonable tardiness.⁷⁶ Bullinger also showed a worldly common sense by reminding parents of the harm that is done by forcing their children into marriages which are repellent to them, though in fact he stated this in terms of compelling 'a young man' against his will. It would be charitable here to assume that Bullinger would apply the same criterion to a young woman, but we do not actually have evidence of this. The approach taken by Vives to the parents' choice is somewhat different. He reminds the father how it is 'a great charge to seke a husband for hys daughter', and not a matter to be approached negligently. The father is told how he can bring his daughter 'perpetuall felycite' or 'perpetuall misery' depending whether he choses her a good or a bad husband. Having said that, he warns of the dangers attached to marrying a man for his wealth, his birth or his looks. He gives little specific advice on the actual choice of a husband though apart from the rather vague words 'good and vertuous'. Interestingly he recommends this on the grounds that good and virtuous spouses for their children will be a succour to the in-laws in their old age⁷⁷

It is worth noting that Vives addresses his advice here to fathers not to mothers, since as Barbara Harris has shown in many cases mothers negotiated the marriages of their daughters. This applied to widows, but also to remarried widows, some of whom like Lady Lisle and rather later in the century Bess of Hardwick successfully arranged marriages between their own children and those of their husband⁷⁸ Vives, when considering the role of widows, does not mention their possible duties in choosing spouses for their children. Another example of a woman who negotiated her children's marriages was Catherine Duchess of Suffolk, who expressed views very similar to Bullinger's, making it clear that she disapproved of forcing young people into marriages they found objectionable.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Bullinger *Christen State*, chapters 5, 6

⁷⁷ Vives, *Instruction*, sigs. P ii v., P iii r., P iii v.

⁷⁸ Barbara J. Harris 'Women and Politics in Early Tudor England', *Historical Journal*, 33 (1990) pp. 260-262

⁷⁹ Charles Knighton, ed. *Cal. S. P. Edward VI* (London 1992) pp.162-3

Duchess Catherine had been married to the Duke of Suffolk, at forty nine many years her senior, while she was still only fourteen.⁸⁰ This may perhaps have influenced her later views on the matter. Bullinger would have been doubtful about the wisdom of that marriage. He urged parents not to marry their children off while they were still young, and he was particularly concerned for the health of young girls who were pushed quickly into motherhood. Such young mothers, he said 'have no just strength neither to norishe nor to bringe forthe the frute'. A child of such a young mother, moreover was likely to be sickly.⁸¹ Bullinger said that the wisest course was to follow the Greeks Plato and Aristotle had considered that seventeen was an appropriate age for girls to marry, and Bullinger believed that this was reasonable. In fact as Peter Laslett has pointed out, despite the apparent contrary indication of young Juliet Capulet, even elite brides in early modern England, with rare exceptions, were not usually very young 990 of Laslett's sample of 1007 brides from the early and mid seventeenth century were aged at least 17, showing that Bullinger's advice might appear to be followed, and four-fifths of the brides were at least twenty. There were some age differences among classes, but overall the average age of brides was twenty three and a half Even the lowest average age, for noble brides, was about nineteen and a half⁸²

When we turn from the preliminaries to marriage itself, the advice writers are full of comments Writing on marriage at this period can be divided into two main types There is writing about the conduct of marriage, moralising on how husbands and wives should live together, or indeed satirical criticism of how they do live together There is also a quite different type of writing, justifying marriage. It is in this type of writing that the scholars of the early modern period showed the differences between themselves and their medieval predecessors, but also revealed how close they were to those predecessors. For much of the middle ages sexual union was considered to be inherently sinful and since sexual union was a fundamental part

⁸⁰ S.J Gunn, *Charles Brandon Duke of Suffolk 1484 - 1545* (Oxford 1988) p. 132

⁸¹ Bullinger, *Christen State*, chapter 6

⁸² Peter Laslett, *The World we have lost: further explored* (London 1983) pp. 82-3. See also Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her* (London 1995) pp. 11, 112, 132. Hufton points out the difference in marriage age in different parts of Europe, the Mediterranean area tending to have a lower marriage age for women.

of marriage, many medieval scholars had serious intellectual problems with marriage. Peter Damian for instance 'reckoned marriage very much worse than a second best', and it was 'a painful concession' for such a man to admit that Christ himself had sanctioned and approved marriage in others.⁸³ Some scholars did not intellectually approve of marriage at all, unless it was a virginal marriage such as that of Mary and Joseph. Celibacy in their eyes was infinitely superior to marriage. 'Aquinas would not even concede that some men had the spiritually inferior task of propagating the race'.⁸⁴ Aquinas and his colleagues might reluctantly accept that some people must marry and have children, but they did not consider this of much relevance to themselves. With the development of humanism however scholars began to agree that marriage was an acceptable and even a desirable way of life for the Christian, and so they began to formulate a set of ideas for living that married life in a way that had 'a moral value' Underlying some of this writing is a tension relating to the marriage of priests. Some Catholic humanist writers, such as Erasmus, were moving towards a position which would see the marriage of priests as permissible, and this is reflected in their warmer attitude towards the marriage of the laity, though of course the Catholic church as a body was not prepared to accept priestly marriage. The earlier humanist writers wrote in an atmosphere which still regarded celibacy as the ideal, but accepted it as the ideal for the few rather than for the many. In 1528, for example William Harrington published his *Commendations of Matrimony*, which was basically a manual for priests to use to help them instruct the laity about marriage. Some of the details Harrington discusses, such as the proper rules for the calling of banns, and the obligation on the curate to make a personal check for impediments to the marriage, were largely connected with the technicalities of marriage. But it is significant that Harrington emphasises the divine approval of matrimony, as 'a lawful and godlye way of lyvinge in this worlde, and a redy path to the lyfe everlasting'.⁸⁵ There is no suggestion here that marriage was to be seen as very much a second-best for those unable to remain celibate.

⁸³ Christopher Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, (Oxford 1991) p. 47

⁸⁴ John K. Yost, 'The value of married life for the social order in the early English renaissance', *Societas*, 6 (1976) p. 26

⁸⁵ William Harrington, *Commendations of Matrimony* (1528) sig. Aii r. See also John K. Yost, *The value of married life for the social order* pp. 25 - 39

Erasmus wrote much on marriage, but a significant contribution to the literature justifying marriage is made by *A ryght fruteful epystle devysed by the moste excellent clerke Erasmus in laude and prayse of matrimony* which was translated by Richard Taverner and published around 1532. Taverner dedicated his translation to Thomas Cromwell with a pointed comment about the 'blind superstition' of those who vow themselves to perpetual chastity before they are sufficiently experienced to understand their own natures, with consequent 'innumberable myscheves'.⁸⁶ Though the book was written by a nominal Catholic, it was a thinly disguised defence of clerical marriage

Erasmus cast his book in the form of a letter to a young man, a supposed kinsman of his, who has abjured matrimony. The young man's friends have offered him a wife, but he has rejected her in favour of perpetual chastity. Erasmus sets out to convince his kinsman that he is mistaken, giving his reasons for considering marriage a more desirable state than celibacy. It was created by God in the Garden of Eden, and approved by Christ's first miracle (the marriage at Cana).⁸⁷ Marriage is moreover part of nature. 'Dumb bestes' reproduce themselves, and Erasmus considers this as 'marriage' rather than a mere reproductive urge. Showing his worldliness and the liberal attitude of the humanist, Erasmus comments that human anatomy is also designed for matrimony, why did God give us members if not to use them? He rejects the argument of those who believe that the 'foule ychyng and pryckes of carnall lust have comen nat of nature, but of sin', saying that these 'pryckes' are needed for marriage, and indeed come from nature.⁸⁸

Erasmus commends the advantages that come from marriage, especially the joys of companionship, of parenthood, (which he considered particularly rewarding⁸⁹) of the assurance of one's posterity, and even, though this 'is the leste part of the goodes that wedlocke hath', of chaste marital sex.⁹⁰ He also reflects on the disadvantages of marriage, though strictly from a male position, considering for example the problem of a wayward wife. Erasmus is able to dismiss these popular

⁸⁶ Erasmus, *A right fruteful epystle . . . in laude and prayse of matrimony* sig. Aii r.

⁸⁷ Erasmus, *Laude and praise of matrimony*, sig. Av

⁸⁸ Erasmus, *op. cit.* sig. Bvii v. - Bviii r.

⁸⁹ Erasmus, *op. cit.* sig. Di r. - Dii r.

⁹⁰ Erasmus, *op. cit.* sig. Cvii r. - Cvii v; Di r. - Di v.

arguments. An evil wife, he says, has been made by an evil husband. Marriage might remove a man's liberty, but so does friendship. Man does not complain of the loss of liberty in friendship, so why complain of this in marriage. Besides, if liberty is so sweet, it is surely better to share it with a companion.⁹¹

Erasmus wrote his book from the male point of view. Does he reflect at all on the implications of marriage for women? He does not appear to. He does give a picture of a model wife when he describes the spouse who had been offered to the young man.

a wyfe of great substaunce, of noble blode, of excellent beautye, of gentyl maners and fynally whiche bereth great love toward you.⁹²

This is clearly only an ideal, not in any sense a real woman. As has been noted, Erasmus discusses the joys of children, and does include the mother here. The emphasis though is on the wife's love for her husband and child, rather than his for his wife. Again when Erasmus describes the comfort the wife gives her husband, he does this in a one-sided manner. The wife, he says, gives up the love of her parents and siblings for him, comforts him in suffering, shares his griefs, and drives away 'the tediousnesse of solytary beyng'⁹³ Not a word is given of what the husband might do for his wife.

As has been said above, *The Laude and Prayse of Matrimony* can be seen as a defence of clerical marriage. As a priest's bastard himself⁹⁴ Erasmus would be well aware of the hypocrisy of much clerical celibacy, and he urged that priests should be allowed to marry their concubines, to live 'openlye with an honest fame' rather than 'with greate infamy and an unquiet conseyence'. Erasmus first wrote this treatise in 1498 and first printed it in 1518, before the marriage of priests had become an important issue with the reformers.⁹⁵ He reflected that the only reason priests were not allowed to marry was because the bishops made a profit out of the fines for concubinage.⁹⁶ By the end of the period being considered here, in England for most writers celibacy was not seen as an ideal at all. Clerical marriage, legitimised for the

⁹¹ Erasmus, *Laude and praise of matrimony*. sig. Dii v. - Diiii v.

⁹² Erasmus, *Laude and prayse of matrimony*. sig. Aii v.

⁹³ Erasmus, *op. cit.* sig. Cvii r.

⁹⁴ Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York 1969 London 1988) pp. 19-20

⁹⁵ Yost, *op. cit.* p.38 n.11

⁹⁶ Erasmus, *op. cit.* sig. Cii v.

first time in 1549, meant that even for the clergy celibacy was no longer held to be an appropriate calling, even if the status of the first clergy wives was far from unequivocal.⁹⁷ Many clergy married immediately clerical marriage was permitted in 1549. As many as 33% were married in the Protestant inclined area of Cambridge, and 10% even in more conservative York, in the four years from 1549 to 1553 when this was possible.⁹⁸ The speed of some of these marriages suggests that priests were glad of the opportunity to legitimise pre-existing unions. Miles Huggarde the Catholic polemicist, however, took pleasure in insulting the morals of most of these priests' wives, saying that they were for the most part 'kept of other before, or else as common as the cartway'.⁹⁹

Bullinger and Agrippa, writing later than Erasmus, were both able to make an almost routine justification of marriage as instituted by God, not by man.¹⁰⁰ Having done this they were able to spend more time considering the benefits, demands and rules of marriage, and their opinions on what constituted a good marriage. Like Erasmus both writers saw marriage from a male point of view, but they both consider the role of the wife in that marriage, if from a firmly patriarchal position.

Bullinger emphasised the indissolubility of marriage in his first chapter. This was part of the divine plan, and for the partners to be separated was literally like tearing a body asunder. Both of those in the marriage should be Christians, since the children of a Christian mother and an infidel father may be brought up as infidels. Bullinger does not consider the same possibility in reverse, but warns of the danger of a Christian husband with an infidel wife being led into idolatry. Although these comments might seem somewhat remote from sixteenth century England, such considerations did worry some of those who became converted to some of the more evangelical forms of Protestantism. Elizabeth Bowes and Anne Locke both felt

⁹⁷ See for example Anne Llewelyn Barstow, 'The First Generation of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?', *Historical magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* [of the U.S.A.] vol. 52 no. 1 (1983) pp. 3 -16; Mary Prior, 'Reviled and crucified marriages: the position of Tudor bishops' wives' in Mary Prior, ed. *Women in English Society 1500 - 1800* (London 1985) pp. 118 - 148

⁹⁸ Figures from Barstow, *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ Miles Huggarde, *The Displaying of the Protestants*, (1554) sig. Jii r.

¹⁰⁰ Agrippa, *Commendation of Matrimony* sig.B r. - B v.; Bullinger *Christen State of Matrimony* chapter 1

justified in separating from their husbands on religious grounds.¹⁰¹ This would not in fact have met with Bullinger's approval, since he felt that the believer should stay with the unbeliever, for the believer sanctified his or her unbelieving spouse.¹⁰² Some of the writings gave explicit consideration to the purposes of marriage. Probably the most influential statement of this, certainly in terms of its durability, was the preamble to the marriage service in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The words were first formulated in 1549, repeated in 1559, and again repeated in very similar form in 1662, with the result that they remained part of the common background of Anglicans until at least late in the twentieth century. Using the words of the 1559 *Prayer Book*, we read:

. . . duly considering the causes for which marriage was ordained. One was the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord and praise of God. Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication, that such persons who have not the gift of continency might marry and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity, into the which holy state these two persons present come now to be joined.¹⁰³

It has been suggested by Lawrence Stone that the influence of the Puritans especially in the later sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries led to a change in the attitude towards marriage, with a greater emphasis being placed on the 'mutual society and comfort' aspect of marriage, which as the above extract shows, was placed third in the Prayer Book list. Stone believed this was part of a change in the relationship between husband and wife towards 'a harmonious and domestic family life', which

¹⁰¹ For Elizabeth Bowes see Christine Newman, 'The Reformation and Elizabeth Bowes' in W J Sheils and Diana Wood, eds., *Studies in Church History vol. 27: Women in the Church* (Oxford 1990) p. 330. For Anne Locke see Patrick Collinson, 'The Role of Women in the English Reformation: illustrated by the life and friendships of Anne Locke' in *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London 1983) pp. 279-280. The case of Anne Askew shows the reverse of the coin since her husband threw her out because of her religious activities. See Elaine V. Beilin, 'Anne Askew's self portrait in the Examination' in Margaret Hannay ed. *Silent but for the Word* (Cambridge 1986)

¹⁰² Bullinger *Christen State*, chapter 4. Bullinger follows St Paul here (I Corinthians 7, vv. 13-15). Paul was of course writing to newly converted Christians whose spouses might still be pagans.

¹⁰³ *Book of Common Prayer*, 1559 edition, quoted in Joan Larsen Klein, ed., *Daughters, Wives, and Widows*, (Urbana 1992), p. 5

somehow coexisted with increasing patriarchalism.¹⁰⁴ As part of this new attitude it might be expected that a greater emphasis would be placed on 'mutual help and comfort' rather than on the other purposes of marriage.

However Kathleen M. Davies, comparing writers on marriage from the fourteenth century Knight of the Tour Landry, to the mid-seventeenth century Puritans, believes no such conclusion can be made. 'Mutual help' was given as a purpose of marriage by the Knight, as it was of course by Cranmer in the *Prayer Book*. Some Puritan writers stressed 'mutual help', making it the first reason for marriage, but by no means all did this. Davies concludes that 'Puritan writers do not seem to have laid particular stress on mutuality at the expense of the older Thomist purposes of marriage'¹⁰⁵

The sources studied here, while earlier than many of those studied by Davies, would seem to support her conclusion. The purposes of marriage given by these early and mid-sixteenth century writers largely reflect the list used in the *Book of Common Prayer*, but there are variations in emphasis and in detail. Bullinger repeats the *Prayer Book* list in the same order, giving a gloss on each reason.¹⁰⁶ Other writers are inconsistent. Vives makes different points in two texts which were intended for different audiences. Writing to women, in the *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, he commends marriage firstly for giving children, and then for mutual companionship, and does not mention marriage as a remedy for fornication.¹⁰⁷ Writing to men, however, in *The Office and Dutie of an Husband*, he instructs his readers that God first invented marriage for the sake of procreation, but that it is now used by the 'luxurious and incontinent person' as a remedy against sin. In this list he does not mention mutual help and comfort.¹⁰⁸

Even the *Homily of the State of Matrimony* of 1563, which could surely be assumed to represent the official point of view since it was appointed to be read in all

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage*, (Harmondsworth 1979)

pp.100 - 105

¹⁰⁵ Kathleen M. Davies, 'Continuity and Change in literary advice on marriage' in R. B. Outhwaite, ed., *Marriage and Society*, (London 1981)p. 63

¹⁰⁶ Bullinger, *Christen State of matrimonye*, chapter 10

¹⁰⁷ Vives, *Instruction*, sig.R ii r.

¹⁰⁸ Vives, *Office and dutie of an husband*, sig. Cii v. Agrippa is also inconsistent, stressing different purposes in different places. Agrippa, *Commendation* sigs B v. & B iii r.

churches, is itself inconsistent. The first paragraph of the homily sets forth the purpose of marriage thus:

It is instituted of God to the intent that man and woman should live lawfully in a perpetual friendly fellowship, to bring forth fruit, and to avoid fornication.¹⁰⁹

Here, a few years after the re-publication of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1559, a homily which may well have been read in the marriage service itself, alters the order of the purposes of marriage, giving the 'Puritan' emphasis. But when explanations are given of the points, the first comment is on the function of marriage in 'bridling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh within the limits of honesty'. This is followed by comment on the purpose of marriage in producing children who will enlarge the kingdom of God, and the need for parents to bring their children up 'in the knowledge of God's word'. No further comment is given at this point on the role of 'friendly fellowship'. Thus the sources considered here, while supporting Stone in his view that there was a stress on the mutuality aspect of marriage, also support Davies in saying that there is no evidence of a consistent hierarchical ranking of the purposes of marriage. Clearly all are considered important, but it cannot be said that any one purpose is universally considered more important than the others.

There was agreement among all the writers on the importance of marriage as the setting for the procreation of children. The repaying of one's debt to nature by the continuation of the race, the expansion of the kingdom of God, are necessary functions. To those who might suggest that marriage was not necessary for the procreation of children, Agrippa reminded them that the bastard was the child of 'an uncertain father and a naughty mother' and had no right to inherit.¹¹⁰ All the writers were obviously aware that not all marriages succeeded in the purpose of procreation. Both Bullinger and Vives are quick to point out that childlessness should not be seen as a sign that the marriage has been a failure. Bullinger reminds his readers of the other purposes of marriage.¹¹¹ Vives goes much further than this and suggests that

¹⁰⁹ *An Homily of the State of Matrimony* (1563) in Klein, ed, *Daughters, Wives, and Widows*, pp.13 - 25

¹¹⁰ Agrippa, *Commendation of matrimony*, sig. B vii v. From the twelfth century the purpose of marriage in ensuring the legitimacy of heirs had been recognised as significant. Christopher N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford 1989) p. 57

¹¹¹ Bullinger, *Christen State*, chapter 10

those of his readers who are childless should rejoice that they have been able to avoid the pain and work that comes with motherhood. Pregnancy brings 'misery', childbirth 'dolor and peryl' and the upbringing of the children involves 'weryness and care' and constant fear for the children's safety. In a surprisingly bitter passage Vives told his readers that if they only knew the care and sorrow children brought, his female readers would 'hate them lyke cruelle wylde beastes or venomous serpents'.¹¹² While Vives reminded his audience that barenness was not a curse he still reassured women that it was acceptable in God's eyes to pray for a child, giving the usual biblical examples. Recourse to any other remedy except prayer, perhaps charms or witchcraft, though, was condemned by Vives. The unfortunate childless woman, with prayer as her only outlet, was not to vent her feelings by blaming her husband for, said Vives, the fault 'is peradventure in thyself'. Nature brought forth 'but verye few baren men, and many women'. The husbands of barren wives were however reminded by Agrippa that this was not an acceptable reason for casting them aside.¹¹³

Childlessness in a young couple was one case in which a marriage failed in the purpose of procreation, but there was also the problem of the marriage which would inevitably be childless. Was it lawful in the eyes of God for 'men that be somewhat aged, yea and those that be decrepitate, and in whom there is no might of generation' to marry? Agrippa, who raised this query, suggested that the marriage was certainly lawful, and might even be necessary, so that the aged man could be looked after in his later dayes' by his well beloved wife.¹¹⁴ Again the female view of this situation was not considered.

Descriptions of the sexual aspect of marriage in terms of 'avoidance of fornication' reveal a certain unease among the advice writers in discussing this area of the marital relationship. There is still evidence of the medieval clerical feeling that marriage was definitely a second-best to celibacy. Marriage legitimises sex. The couple can come together without fault; 'without synne the duetie is gyven' says Agrippa, and emphasises that this is the case even if there is no specific intention of conceiving a child.¹¹⁵ Both partners in the marriage had rights and obligations. There

¹¹² Vives, *Instruction*, sig. fi v. - fii r.

¹¹³ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. fii r. - fiii r.

¹¹⁴ Agrippa, sig. Biii r.

¹¹⁵ Agrippa, *Commendation*, sig. C r.

was a right to ask for sex, and a duty to give it, applying equally to both husband and wife.¹¹⁶ Agrippa advised each spouse that they 'shulde bear the others fraynesse, to suffer and take superflous copulation', but reminded them they must avoid the unlawful, by which he probably meant unorthodox sexual activities. Neither spouse had a right to refuse sex or to demand to live 'continent' unless the other consented. This had also been the position under the medieval church. Margery Kempe, for example, took three years to persuade her husband to give up his conjugal rights so that she could live as a celibate.¹¹⁷

Similar views on married sex were held by Bullinger, who described marriage as a medicine against whoredom for those who cannot live without sexual relations.¹¹⁸ This seemingly negative view was alleviated a little by his reassurance that since St. Paul said that marriage was not a sin, then 'must it folowe that the workes of mariage are not synne' Bullinger warned though that 'our mistemperaunce & excesse may make it evell whiche is good and defyle that [which] is cleane'¹¹⁹ A similar point is made more strongly by Vives. In his book addressed to women, he reminded husbands that they should not be 'masters of wantonnes and lechery unto their wyves', and urged them to 'have their wyves as vessels of generation in holynes, and not in unlesfull concupiscence or immoderate, as the pagans do' Vives commended the chaste Spartan wife who said she never went to her husband, but always waited for him to come to her, for 'the chaste woman never provoked the lust of her husband' Chastity to Vives was of overpowering importance, and this applied in marriage as in girlhood. Addressing male readers, Vives gave a very similar message. A husband should 'refrayne [from] the immoderate pleasure and voluptuousnes of the bodye', and at certain times of the year abstain from his wife's 'embracements' and from lying with her. Instead he should concentrate on prayer and fasting. Here Vives is expressing a typical pre-Reformation Catholic view.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ *1 Corinthians* 7, vv.3-4

¹¹⁷ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed Barry Windeatt (Harmondsworth 1985) pp. 46-47, 58-60

¹¹⁸ c.f. *1 Corinthians* 7 v.9

¹¹⁹ Bullinger, *Christen State*, chapter 10

¹²⁰ Vives, *Office and Dutie of an Husband*, sigs. Riiij r. - Rvi v. The church traditionally required abstention from sex during Lent and Advent as well as during menstruation. Brooke, *Medieval Idea of Marriage*. p. 58

Although Vives' thoughts expressed here may seem unrealistic, at least he is allowing for the possibility of virtue in women. Those writers who believed that women did experience sexual pleasure, were also liable to believe in women as lustful and immoral creatures. The anonymous author of the *Deceyte of Women* for instance told various prurient tales of adulterous wives who clearly found sexual satisfaction, if in the arms of their lovers rather than their husbands.¹²¹

The more mundane aspects of marriage were considered by some writers. Xantippe, the shrew in Erasmus's *Mery Dialogue declaringe the propertyes of shrowde shrewes and honest wyves*, complains bitterly of her husband's coming home drunk, and at times she says he 'bespeweth the bed'. The angry Xantippe, who is not intended to be a sympathetic character, exclaims that she would rather spend the night with the sow and her piglets in the sty, than with her disgusting husband.¹²² Equally annoying if less repellent is the husband described by Gosynhill, who having come back to bed after a nocturnal call of nature, turns a cold backside towards his wife (having failed to kiss her goodnight) and pulls all the bedclothes over himself.

lapped himself round all about
and thrusteth me out of my place
leveth me scantly one rag or clout
to cover or cast over my face¹²³

It is left to Erasmus's virtuous Eulalia to remind Xantippe (and readers like Gosynhill's character) that the marital bed is the place to 'make amends' not to have quarrels. If the bed is 'polluted either with strife or grugynges', then she can bid farewell to all hopes of love. Instead the good wife should be 'full of pastime and pleasure', and perhaps a happy sex life is hinted at here.¹²⁴ Certainly in the *Praise of marriage* Erasmus is very balanced about sex, querying why something that comes from nature should be considered foul, and why the other bodily functions are considered less foul than 'the lawfull and permitted pleasure of the body'.¹²⁵

It is when the pattern of behaviour of husband and wife to each other is examined that we are most conscious of the sense of patriarchy that modern historians

¹²¹ *Deceyte of women*, passim

¹²² Erasmus, *A mery dialogue declaringe the propertyes of shrowde shrewes and honest wyves* (London 1557) sig. Aiii r.

¹²³ Gosynhill, *Scholehouse of women*, sigs. Aiii r. - Aiii v.

¹²⁴ Erasmus, *A mery dialogue*, sig. Dvi r.

¹²⁵ Erasmus, . . . *laude and praise of matrimony*, sig. Bviii v.

have seen within early modern marriage. This is apparent both in the advice books and in the satires. The classic statement of the correct relationship of husband and wife was given by St Paul.

Wives submit yourself unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let wives be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.¹²⁶

The newly married woman would hear this passage quoted in the model sermon given in the marriage service, and it was also in the *Homily on Matrimony*. It was impossible for the wife to be ignorant of her duty of obedience and subjection. Bullinger, writing one of the best known treatises on marriage, stressed the same point, that the wife should submit herself to her husband, and listen only to him. At the same time Bullinger reminded the husband that though he was the wife's head, this did not give him the right to be as a tyrant to her.¹²⁷ The wife's duty of obedience was further reinforced by Vives, who urged that 'she shulde give hym great worshyp, reverence, great obedyence and service also'¹²⁸ Should she have doubts about this, Vives reminded his female readers that if they presumed to have mastery over their husbands they were to be regarded as foolish and 'the more worthy to be mocked', and they were indeed overturning the laws of nature.¹²⁹ Giving advice to husbands, Vives takes the wife's obedience for granted but reminds the man that he must be worthy of that obedience. If he is a drunkard, or a 'follower of other men's wives' he cannot reasonably expect her to accept his insistence that she be temperate and chaste.¹³⁰

How was the husband to maintain his wife's obedience? As noted above, Bullinger urged the husband not to be a tyrant. None of the authors studied here advised husbands to beat their wives, indeed there was an emphasis on the need for the husband to treat her with respect. Vives though advised the wife to accept beating

¹²⁶ *Ephesians*, 5: 22-25

¹²⁷ Bullinger, *Christen State*, chapter 14

¹²⁸ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. Tiii r.

¹²⁹ Vives, *op. cit.* sig. Tiv r. He claimed that in wedlock the man represented reason, and the woman the body, and in this relationship the reason rather than the body must rule.

¹³⁰ Vives, *Husband*, sig. Qv r. - Qv v.

meekly, regarding it as if it was God's punishment for her sins.¹³¹ Agrippa urged husbands to treat their wives with wisdom, favour and reverence, and to regard them 'not as a drudge, but as maistresse of the house'.¹³² Vives however, despite his support for the academic education of women, did suggest (to a male audience) that a wealthy man who married a poor wife, provided she was brought up to be hard working and chaste, had aquired himself both a wife and a servant. He made clear that the man would not want to be bothered with domestic duties himself. To a man, having to cook, clean and bring up the children would be 'misery and bondage'.¹³³ For a woman it was presumably second nature.

A man could hope to guarantee his wife's obedience by educating her himself. Vives recommended him to take a wife 'who is apt to learn' so that he could 'fashion [her] to his owne maners and customes'.¹³⁴ Erasmus's Eulalia gives an example of a husband who did this because he wished for an 'unbroken' wife so he could 'breake her after his own mind'. He picked a seventeen year old girl, taught her 'learninge syngyng and playinge' and also required her to repeat the salient points of the sermons she had heard. The girl's response was rebellion and tantrums. Her father urged her husband to give the girl a good beating, and when he declined, the father himself 'spake so sharply' to the girl that she feared a beating anyway. He told his daughter how lucky she was to be married to a man who could have had the pick of all women to be his wife. The humiliation worked, and the girl, having begged her husband's forgiveness, became the perfect humble and obedient wife. After this, we are told, there was 'great love . . . betwene them'.¹³⁵ Hints given elsewhere by Erasmus suggest that this story may be based on Thomas More's first marriage.¹³⁶ Whether or not this is the case, it is clear that the reader is meant to approve of the husband's actions.

Thomas More's own attitude towards marriage was deeply ambivalent. His early, hagiographical biographer Stapleton wrote that More as a young man feared that he would not be able to resist the temptations of the flesh, and so decided to

¹³¹ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. Xiii r.

¹³² Agrippa, *Commendation of matrimony* sig. cvii r.

¹³³ Vives, *Husband*, sig. E vi r. - E vi v.

¹³⁴ Vives, *Husband* sig. Gviii v.

¹³⁵ Erasmus, *Praise of Matrimony*, sigs. B r. - Biii r.

¹³⁶ Richard Marius, *Thomas More*, London 1986, pp. 40 - 41

marry. He would rather have been a priest, but doubted whether he had the gift of total chastity, and unlike many of his contemporaries was not prepared to compromise. This led him into marriage with Jane Colt, who may be the original of the wife in Erasmus's anecdote. Richard Marius suggests that since More's motive for marriage was 'sexual necessity' then 'almost any wife would do' and her character could be modelled as he wished. Even more curious is the way that More was remarried, to Alice Middleton, only a month after Jane's death. Richard Marius suggests that More's motive here was the reverse of his motive when marrying Jane. Alice was older than More, perhaps menopausal. This would rule out the possibility of sex, which More would only have accepted if it could be procreative. 'His marriage with Dame Alice . . . was probably a quiet and unobtrusive way of living a life of sexual abstinence while he remained in the world to do his duty to his children, his father, and to society at large'¹³⁷ Yet again the feelings of the women involved seem to have been of little account.

Thomas More saw wifely subjection as desirable Vives tells a long anecdote emphasising the extent to which the wife should subordinate her own feelings to her obedience to her husband. He tells of Clara Valdaura, the wife of Bernard Valdaura of Bruges. Clara was married at eighteen to the much older Bernard, and soon discovered that he was sick of the French pox. When he was taken ill, she and her mother nursed him through a variety of revolting symptoms. Their twenty year long marriage produced eight children, two of them born during the years of his sickness. Yet even despite this evidence of continuing sexual contact between them, Clara remained untouched by the disease. Amazingly when Bernard at last died, Clara, far from rejoicing, bemoaned his death, and as a widow continued to follow the commandments he had given her while he lived. Since Clara's daughter Margaret became Vives' wife, we can assume that this story is substantially true.¹³⁸ While a modern writer might quote such a case to condemn the syphilitic Bernard, Vives used it to commend Clara's subjection to her husband.

Another popular example of the subjection and obedience required of wives was the story of 'Patient Griselda'. It was used in the later middle ages by both

¹³⁷ Marius, *Thomas More* p.42

¹³⁸ Vives, *Instruction* sigs. Uiiii r. to X r. See also Larsen, *Daughters Wives and Widows*, pp. 116 - 118, and p. 116 n. 87

Geoffrey Chaucer and Christine de Pisan. Christine's version, translated and published in English in the 1520s, narrated the life of the unfortunate Grysylde in long and painful detail, from the Marquess's taking the peasant girl Grysylde to be his wife, to his proposal to put her on one side and replace her with a new wife who turned out to be Grysylde's own daughter, taken from her as a baby by the Marquess. Christine de Pisan, for all her apparent feminist principles, repeated the story without critical comment, apparently approving of Grysylde's total subjection to her husband's will. Christine's real feelings about this were not made clear.¹³⁹

The subjection of wives was accepted without question, following the teachings of St Paul. However there were circumstances which could lead to the God-given nature of this subjection being queried. If women were naturally subject to men, could God allow a woman be a ruler? Coincidence (or divine providence) had supplied a surprising number of female rulers in Europe in the early and mid sixteenth century, from Isabella the Catholic onwards, through women viceroys in the Netherlands and France to Mary Queen of Scots and her mother Mary of Guise in Scotland. England itself of course was ruled by queens for half a century from 1553. It is hardly surprising therefore that the right of women to rule became a matter of public interest. The key text of the debate was John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*.¹⁴⁰ Knox argued from the Bible, nature and the ancient world that for a woman to rule was 'repugnant to nature, contumelie to God a subversion of good order, of all equitie and justice'¹⁴¹ For Knox, Mary Tudor and Mary of Guise (whose rule led to his 'first blast'), compounded the sin of female rule with the sin of Roman Catholicism, but Mortimer Levine suggests that 'sexual rather than religious bigotry' was his main motive. Certainly Protestant writers, otherwise loyal subjects of the Protestant Elizabeth, could have extreme difficulty with accepting the theory of female rule. Sir Thomas Smith for instance (writing in 1565) said that a woman 'ought not to meddle in matters abroade, nor to beare office

¹³⁹ Christine de Pisan, *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladies* sigs. Li v. - Lvi r.

¹⁴⁰ See Amanda Shepherd, *Gender and Authority* (Keele 1994) for a discussion of the 'Knox debate'.

¹⁴¹ John Knox, *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1557) f. 9

in a cite or commonwealth no more than children or infants'.¹⁴² The problem of women's 'natural' subjection was one of the bases of John Knox's hostility to female rulers. He cited several of the fathers of the church to support his argument that woman must be subject to man (normally to her husband). Disobedience in a woman is sin; her destiny is to obey.¹⁴³

Aylmer, in his reply to Knox, tried to juggle his belief in the subjection of women, with his conviction that Elizabeth had a right to be queen. He accepted the subjection of a woman to her husband as a fact of nature, but claimed this did not apply in all circumstances. He used the analogy of the natural subjection of a son to his father, which was overturned if the son should happen to be a magistrate when his father was not. If a woman was a magistrate, therefore, she could in that capacity have rule over her husband. Elyot's Queen Zenobia might be thought to give support to Aylmer's point of view, but Zenobia also stressed the need for women, including queens, to obey their husbands, and said that in her marriage she had done nothing that would not please her husband.¹⁴⁴

Conscious of the argument against women rulers, that a married queen would be obliged to obey her husband even to the detriment of her country (as Knox argued that Mary Tudor had done), Aylmer presented certain limits on the extent of a wife's obedience. While these limits are related to the specialised case of the woman as ruler, it is noteworthy that he makes the point at all. Aylmer said that the wife's duty of obedience to her husband is negated if he commands her to do something ungodly. In that case, her duty is to obey God rather than her husband.¹⁴⁵ Aylmer is here treating the woman as a person in her own right, capable of making her own

¹⁴² Mortimer Levine 'The place of women in Tudor government' in D.J. Guth and J. W. McKenna eds. *Tudor Rule and Revolution: essays for G.R. Elton from his American friends* (Cambridge 1982) pp. 111, 113

¹⁴³ Augustine considered that woman was not made in the image of God in comparison to man. God was very definitely to be seen as male. Basilus Magnus said woman was 'a tendre creature, flexible, soft and pitiful'. This tenderness was not a virtue, allowing Satan to make her disobedient. John Knox, *The First Blast*, (facsimile edition of first edition, London 1557, Amsterdam 1972), f. 19v. -23v.; f. 25r. - 25v; f. 28v.

¹⁴⁴ Sir Thomas Elyot, 'The Defence of Good Women', in Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, (London) 1912) p. 235

¹⁴⁵ John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trew e Subiectes*, London 1559 sig. Giii r.

decisions. His view on the limits of obedience accords with the views expressed regarding obedience to secular government, both by Luther, and in the *Homily on Obedience* of 1547.¹⁴⁶ The writer of the *Homily on Obedience* states that 'we may not obey kings, magistrates or any other (though they be our own fathers), if they would command us to do anything contrary to God's commandments. In such a case . . . we must rather obey God than man'.¹⁴⁷ The words 'or any other' used here could be taken to give liberty for wives to disobey their husbands in certain circumstances, though the homilist stresses that only passive disobedience is acceptable in a political context. Even Vives, otherwise a great champion of wifely obedience, insisted that women must not obey their husbands if commanded to do things that were against the law of God.¹⁴⁸

The Catholic Vives also expressed views on the right to rule, though more obliquely. Like the Protestant Knox, Vives quoted Saint Paul forbidding women to speak in the congregation. This he interpreted to mean 'that you shall not medle with matter of realmes or cyties: your own house is a citie great inoughe for you'. This could be seen simply to reinforce Vives' belief that women should remain within the house, but his references to 'realmes and cities' seem at the very least to be forbidding women involvement in public life.¹⁴⁹

On a much less elevated level, the question of a wife's obedience and subjection to her husband was also considered by those who wrote in a more popular or more satirical vein about women. Robert Copland's *Complaint of them that be soone maryed* shows the unfortunate husband claiming that the joy of his marriage lasted 'aboute thre dayes' before he began to suffer from sorrow and care. Far from his new wife being in subjection to him, he found marriage a servitude. His young wife resented his demands that she work alongside him to help recoup the costs of the wedding. Her female relatives and friends all turned up, drank his wine and ate his food while abusing him, but he must still 'holde my pease'. To make matters still worse the wife expected quantities of new clothes and jewelry, which he could not

¹⁴⁶ Martin Luther, 'Secular Authority: To what extent it should be obeyed', in E. G. Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, *Martin Luther* (London 1970), pp. 111 -112

¹⁴⁷ 'A Homily on Obedience' (1547) in G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*. (Cambridge 1982), pp. 15 - 16

¹⁴⁸ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. Y r.

¹⁴⁹ Vives *Instruction* sig. d r.

afford. In the end he felt himself a martyr, reduced to longing for death as the only escape from his miseries. Clearly the wife Copland presents here is the antithesis of the obedient and humble wife commended by Vives.¹⁵⁰

The popular dialogue form gave its authors the opportunity of presenting both a supportive and a hostile view of the subjection of women. Erasmus's Xantippe (taking her name of course from the notoriously shrewish wife of Socrates) argued that she would not put up with abuse from her husband. When she thought he was about to beat her, she had grabbed a three legged stool to defend herself, and assured her friend Eulalia that she would not have hesitated to use it if he had 'but ones layd his littell finger on me'. To Eulalia's protests, Xantippe objected that if her husband did his duty, she would do hers. Eulalia's predictable response was that 'when the matter is so farre that the one must forber the other, it is reason that the woman give place unto the man'¹⁵¹.

This assumption of subjection is also seen in Robert Vaughan's *Dyalogue defensyve for women against malycyous detractors*. Despite the title, and the authorial support for the feminist Falcon, the misogynist Pie is given much space to express his hostile views. The Falcon cites Aristotle in support of a list of women's functions, largely domestic, which ends with a comment on women's virtues: humility, patience, sobriety, continence, diligence, summed up in the words quoted from scripture that woman is called 'an helper to man'. Once again woman's virtues are seen to involve subjection to her husband. The Pie in his response interestingly does not challenge this, but accuses woman of tempting man into vice by the use of her sexual attractions. At the end of the book, when the Pie admits he has attacked women at the behest of Malice, he added that he had hope of 'promocyons and profytes' from men, but not from women, whose 'power is small in felde and in towne'. Women, according to the Pie, were inferior, insignificant creatures with little power of patronage.¹⁵²

One of the most dramatic examples of the failure of women to conform to the ideal of subjection that is met in the group of books studied here, is the frontispiece

¹⁵⁰ Robert Copland, *A complaint of them that be soone maryed*, (?1535)

¹⁵¹ Erasmus, *A mery dialogue declaringe the properties of shrowde shrewes and honest wyves*, (1557)

¹⁵² Robert Vaughan, *A dialogue defensyve for women*, (1542) sigs. Cii r. - Civ r., Diii r. E ii r.

for the anonymous *The deceyte of women to the instruction and ensample of all men, yonge and old*. This is a version of the 'woman on top' image of a woman seated riding on the back of a crouching man, with a whip in her hand and a bridle in his mouth. This was designed to frighten and disgust male readers. The origin of this image, described by Natalie Zemon Davis as 'the most popular comic example of the female's temporary rule' is the story of Aristotle and Phyllis. Alexander the Great, Aristotle's pupil, was giving too much attention to the lovely Phyllis, leading the philosopher to rebuke him. To have her revenge, Phyllis tricked the old man into crouching down on all fours and allowing her to ride on his back, bridle and all. Thus, as Davis puts it 'youth overthrows age, and sexual passion, dry sterile philosophy, nature surmounts reason, and the female, the male'¹⁵³ Davis's words seem to imply a certain level of sympathy or even approval of Phyllis's behaviour. The author of the *Deceyte*, however, regards women with a very hostile eye and most of his book consists of stories of women who betrayed or deceived their husbands. These women were far from conforming to the ideals of subjection or even of fidelity¹⁵⁴

Another area for which women were routinely criticised was their vanity. In particular women were criticised for their love of showy and extravagant dress, and for their use of cosmetics. A notable example of this is Charles Bansley's *A treatise shewing . . . the pryde and abuse of women now a dayes*. Bansley believed that pride is the root of all sin, and that much of a woman's pride lies in her clothes. These clothes reveal the nature of her soul hidden beneath. 'For Scripture saith yt your proud garment & behaviour do shewe playnely what you are wythin'. The genuinely pious woman will not wear 'proude raymente'. She who does, and especially she who also wears cosmetics, is on her way to hell.

Sponge up your vysage olde bousing trotte and trycke it wyth the beste
Tyll you tricke and trotte youre selfe / to the devyls trounsynge neste.

Extreme fashions, as one might expect, bring Bansley's particular scorn, somewhat bluntly expressed.

Downe for shame with these bottell arste bumines
a bousing packsadel for the devil to ryde on.

¹⁵³ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, (Stanford 1975), pp.135 - 136

¹⁵⁴ Anon., *The Deceyte of women to the instruction and ensample of all men, yonge and old, newly corrected*, (1557)

Cosmetics are, if that were possible, even worse. For Bansley, for a woman to paint her face was to follow a 'horysshe fashyon' which would bring her 'yll fame and sclanderous estemacyon'.¹⁵⁵ Vives was similarly sharp about the woman who uses cosmetics to attract a husband. By adulterating her appearance with make-up, she is in effect as bad as an adulterer. Vives also reflected upon the dire effects on her health of using cosmetics. Since he referred to the use of white lead and mercury, he was probably not exaggerating.

. . . the tender skynne wyl revyll the more sone, and all the favour of the face waxeth olde, and the brethe stynketh and the tethe rusten, and yvell ayre all the bodye over, both by reason of the ceruse, and quick silver [that she uses]. . .¹⁵⁶

Vives also condemned fashion and extravagant dress, suggesting that the young girl should be simply dressed in wool and linen, without jewelry.¹⁵⁷ He appears to forget at this point that he is ostensibly writing for a king's daughter. The portrait of the young Elizabeth aged about thirteen, exactly the kind of age Vives is likely to be considering, shows her in fine brocade and much 'important jewelry'.¹⁵⁸ Other writers used women's love (or supposed love) of fine clothes to criticise them. The discontented Xantippe complained that she had 'not a hole smock to put on my back'. Eulalia, whose new dress had occasioned Xantippe's comment, piously protested that the honest wife's apparel should not be the clothes on her back or the 'tirements of [her] head' but the 'ornaments of the soul'.¹⁵⁹ Copland's unfortunate young husband was expected to buy 'newe habytes Gownes and other abyllmentes' as well as a variety of jewels 'rynges of golde perles and cresolytes Bedes and gyrdelles with longe pendentes'. This makes clear that rich and fashionable dress was associated in the popular mind with financial extravagance, for Copland's husband complained that since he had neither 'house ne rentes' to live on, he was struggling to keep up with his

¹⁵⁵ Charles Bansley, *A treatise shewing the pryde and abuse of women now a dayes* (? 1550) sigs. Ai v., Bii r., Biii r.

¹⁵⁶ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. Gii v. Thomas Raynald also showed disapproval of cosmetics, but was apparently concerned about evil smells, since he gave a recipe for a deodorant. Raynald, *Byrth of Mankind* f. 148 v.

¹⁵⁷ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. H r.; Hii v.

¹⁵⁸ Karen Hearn, *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530 - 1630* [catalogue of exhibition Oct. 1995 - Jan. 1996 Tate Gallery] (London 1995) pp.78 -79

¹⁵⁹ Erasmus, *Shrowde Shrewes* sig. Aii v.

wife's expenditure.¹⁶⁰ Although the moralists and the satirists both condemn women's wearing rich and fashionable clothes, there is no comment to suggest that their attitude is influenced by the sumptuary laws, which indeed excluded women.¹⁶¹

What ever character a married woman had, whether she was pious and frugal, or extravagant and fashionable, she was likely to fulfill her destiny and produce children. It has already been noted that the procreation of children was regarded as one of the three purposes of marriage. and for most women marriage would lead soon enough to motherhood.¹⁶² In some cases indeed marriage led to motherhood within less than nine months.¹⁶³ The writers considered here do not concern themselves with that particular moral problem, but as might be expected there is an interest in motherhood. Of particular importance here is one of the earliest gynaecological textbooks to appear in English, Thomas Raynald's version of Eucharis Roesslin's *The Byrth of Mankind*. Raynald's edition was in fact the second English translation within a few years, but as the longer and more widely used version it is the one used here.

It should be noted that Raynald addressed a preface to women readers, to whom he thought the book would be useful, but he also referred to ladies and gentlewomen having the previous edition of the *Byrth of Mankind* read aloud to their midwives while they laboured in childbed. It is implied that the ladies had already read the book themselves, while also making the point that the midwives would be unlikely to be literate¹⁶⁴ Raynald was himself a physician and wrote from a physician's viewpoint. Audrey Eccles suggests that as such, he was unlikely to have had any obstetric experience himself¹⁶⁵ The popularity of his book however demonstrates that readers were eager for his advice, if only because little such material was

¹⁶⁰ Copland, *Soone maryed*, sig. A iii r.

¹⁶¹ Wilfrid Hooper, 'The Tudor Sumptuary Laws', *English Historical Review*, 30, (1915) pp. 433 - 449

¹⁶² About 12 % of marriages were childless through infertility, and a similar number lost all their children, so three quarters of married women would share much of their lives with children. It is coincidental rather than deliberate choice that 3 out of 5 of the women used as case studies here were evidently childless. Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760* p. 76

¹⁶³ Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England 1570-1640* (Cambridge 1987) p.219 suggests that about a fifth of brides were pregnant.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Raynald, *The Byrth of Mankind* (1545) sig. Cviii v.

¹⁶⁵ Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England* (London 1982) p.11

available in the vernacular. Jacob Rueff's *De conceptu et generatione hominis*, for example, while published in Latin in 1554, was not translated into English until 1637.

¹⁶⁶ Raynald was conscious that some readers might consider gynaecological information inappropriate for women, and hastened to defend himself. First he pointed out the problems many women had in understanding their physician's diagnosis because of their ignorance of 'the inward'. Secondly he dealt with the accusation that if men knew about the workings of women's bodies they might conceive a 'lothsomnes and abhoringe' towards them. Raynald countered this with the robust comment that no part in a woman was 'more to be abhored, than in man'. Nonetheless Raynald did remember the importance of modesty, and reminded his male readers that the subject matter of his book was not for common discussion. Women would only wish to hear of such things from their physicians or their 'discreete' husbands. He does not consider the possibility that women would in fact discuss gynaecological matters in all-female gatherings, which would seem to be the most likely way such information was transmitted.¹⁶⁸

Raynald deals with many aspects of pregnancy, including conception itself. He believed that the man was 'the principall mover and cause of ye generation'¹⁶⁹ but the woman also had her part to play. Like the man, she produced seed which moistened her 'privy passage' and helped to attract his seed into her womb, to prepare it for conception. This female 'seed' was only produced when the woman was sexually aroused with 'great and fervent desyre', leading Joan Larsen Klein to suggest that Raynald did women a service by emphasising that they needed to enjoy the sex act if there was to be conception.¹⁷⁰ The contrary side of this however was that women who became pregnant following rape were assumed to have no case against the man, since by definition they had enjoyed the experience.

¹⁶⁶ Eccles, *Obstetrics*, p. 13

¹⁶⁷ *Byrth of Mankind*, sig. Cvi v.

¹⁶⁸ c.f. Edward Shorter's comment about the discontinuity of knowledge among women about methods of abortion in the first half of the twentieth century, 'their mothers didn't tell them'. Such knowledge had previously been passed among women 'for generations'. Edward Shorter, *Women's Bodies* (New Brunswick, 1991; originally published as *A History of Women's Bodies*) p.223

¹⁶⁹ *Byrth of Mankind*, sig. Diii r.

¹⁷⁰ *Byrth of Mankind*, sig. G v.; Klein, *Daughters, Wives and Widows* p.178

Raynald wrote little about the signs of pregnancy, but the cessation of menstruation was not regarded in the sixteenth century as the basic indicator of pregnancy. It was of course known that the periods stopped, but Raynald believed that they stopped only gradually. The cessation of a woman's periods meant that the menstrual blood had been diverted to nourish the child in the womb, which was its prime purpose. After birth, the menstrual fluid travelled up into the breasts where it became the milk, again to nourish the child. Raynald insisted, against the teachings of both Pliny and his immediate predecessor Richard Jonas, that the menstrual blood was not a venomous and dangerous substance, nor was it the result of the purging of the woman's blood. Would nature have used something impure to nourish a 'delicate' infant, he wondered.¹⁷¹ Raynald was unusually liberal in his views here, since in the Bible the menstruating woman was used as a metaphor for that which was profane or disgusting, and there was considerable popular folklore which regarded the touch of a menstruating woman as polluting.¹⁷²

The duration of pregnancy was known from observation to be about nine months, though it was believed that it could last for ten or even eleven months. It was also known that children could be successfully born alive at seven months, but curiously an eight months child was believed not to be viable. It was thought that a foetus of seven months would struggle to be born, but an eight months one would not¹⁷³

A key part in the birth process was taken by the midwife *The Byrth of Mankind* had in fact originated as German midwifery textbook written by the state physician of Worms and Frankfort am Main.¹⁷⁴ Roesslin had been scathing about the inadequacies of midwives in 1513, and Raynald continued this criticism in 1545.¹⁷⁵ Rural midwives were often illiterate peasant women whose training would have been

¹⁷¹ Eccles. *Obstetrics*. p.58; *Byrth of Mankind* ff. 44 r - v.

¹⁷² Patricia Crawford, 'Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth Century England', *Past and Present* 91 (1981) pp. 47, 61

¹⁷³ *Byrth of mankind*, sig. Kii ; Eccles, *Obstetrics* p.45 The issue of the length of gestation could be important for a pregnant widow. The Act of Parliament 10-11 William III cap. 16 declined to state a specific time after which a posthumous child could not be considered legitimate. Eccles, op. cit. p.45

¹⁷⁴ Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics* p. 11

¹⁷⁵ Shorter, op. cit. pp. 35-36; *Byrth of Mankind*, sigs. D - D v.

minimal, except for observation of others.¹⁷⁶ Urban midwives might be better trained, but in England at least there was no formal provision for training.¹⁷⁷ What was required was a licence from the bishop. This was originally connected with the duty of midwives to baptise new born infants who were not expected to live. Licensing was based therefore on religious orthodoxy, not professional training or evidence of technical competence.

Raynald assumed that such technical competence did exist. The methods he recommended included a considerable amount of manipulation. In what was expected to be a normal delivery the midwife was urged to handle 'the places' to ease the infant's passage, and to rupture the membranes if necessary. The midwife was also expected to be able to turn the child in the case of any presentation other than the standard one. The placenta might need to be manually extracted, and a warning was given to avoid pulling too hard for fear of damage to the uterus itself. In some cases of course the infant was already dead before birth. Here the concern was to remove the dead foetus in the hope of saving the mother. Fumigations, such as burning ass's dung were placed underneath the mother¹⁷⁸ but if this failed, then instruments must be used. Raynald makes clear that the midwife herself should use the instruments, it was not necessary for her to call in a surgeon. While some of the attendant women should hold the mother down and try to comfort her, the midwife was to use a hook to extract the foetus, dismembering it if necessary.¹⁷⁹ No doubt at this point some mothers would have preferred Raynald's advice when the midwife thought the mother was in too poor a state to survive, that she should 'commyt the cure of her to the hands of almyghty God'¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Eccles comments that English gentlewomen very rarely became midwives, while Gelis suggests that in France midwives were at the 'bottom of the social ladder'. Eccles, *Obstetrics*, p. 116, Gelis, *History of Childbirth* p.107

¹⁷⁷ The situation was better in some European states, at least towards the end of the sixteenth century. In 1573 midwives in Braunschweig-Wolfenbuttel were expected to attend autopsies on mothers who died during delivery, to help them prevent such problems in the future, and a training school was opened in Munich in 1589. There may also have been formal training of midwives at the Hotel Dieu in Paris before the end of the sixteenth century. Shorter, *Women's Bodies*, pp. 42-43

¹⁷⁸ *Byrth of Mankind*, sig. Qv

¹⁷⁹ *Byrth of mankind*, ff 98 v - 99r

¹⁸⁰ *Byrth of Mankind*, sig Q iiiii r

In some circumstances of course it would be clear to those around her that the mother was dying, but that there was hope that the child would survive. When the woman died, the midwife must ensure that her mouth and 'nether places' were kept open, to allow air to enter and to be expelled by the foetus. Then the mother could be cut open, so that the child could be extracted from her belly. Children born in this dramatic manner could survive and indeed thrive, and Raynald comments on the use of the name Caesarian for such children, after Julius Caesar.¹⁸¹ Raynald writes only briefly of such operations, which would presumably require a surgeon.¹⁸² For the infant thus 'not of woman born' the chances of survival might not be great, but such a birth was associated with being singled out for a special future. Thus Shakespeare's Macduff was born by Caesarian section, and this form of birth played a part in the legends of some saints, such as the Spanish St. Ramon, who became a patron saint of women in childbirth.¹⁸³

For most women the experience of childbirth would not be so desperate as to involve a Caesarian section or the use of instruments, but it was likely to be painful. There was realistically little that could be done about this. Raynald suggested methods of easing labour, which were largely based on being the opposites of those factors which he said caused a difficult birth. He recommended foods to combat constipation, such as apples and figs,¹⁸⁴ and referred to the birthing stool which was used on the continent, but in terms suggesting that this was not used in England.¹⁸⁵ Probably little effective could be done for relief of pain during the delivery itself though Raynald does give recipes for medicines for a pain free labour, one of which includes opium. His recipes also include rue and savin, which were established

¹⁸¹ *Byrth of Mankind*, sig. Ri r.

¹⁸² There may have been cases of midwives and others (priests, farmers) carrying out Caesarians successfully, since there are hints of this in the records and in oral tradition, but J.-R. Tenon writing in 1788, was aware of only 79 successful Caesarians in Europe since 1500. The first known successful Caesarian in the U.S.A. was in 1794. Edward Shorter, *Women's Bodies*, pp.160-161 (2nd ed. New Brunswick 1991)

¹⁸³ Jaques Gelis, *History of Childbirth*, (Cambridge, 1991) p.237

¹⁸⁴ *Byrth of Mankind*, ff. 52 r., 55 r., 55 v., 56 r.

¹⁸⁵ *Byrth of Mankind*, f.58 v. But see the reference to Sabine Johnson's having a groaning chair in Chapter Eight below. p. 253

traditional abortifacients, and no doubt seen as having useful expulsive properties in birth itself.¹⁸⁶

It was accepted that women must suffer in childbirth.¹⁸⁷ There is some evidence of sympathy towards women in their plight, for example Vives mentioned the 'great dolour and peryl' experienced by the woman in labour.¹⁸⁸ The suffering and the danger which were apparently women's lot, lead one to question whether women were able to do anything to prevent birth. It is known that methods of birth control and abortion were used from the ancient world onwards, and there is evidence of their use in the late middle ages.¹⁸⁹ According to John M. Riddle the scholarly medical writers of the Renaissance showed less knowledge of contraceptive methods than their forbears, because the graduate physicians of the period had much less to do with making up drugs than earlier medieval doctors. The lack of precise information in medical books however does not mean that women did not preserve traditional knowledge.¹⁹⁰ The church condemned contraception and abortion, though some people believed that since the child did not receive its soul until after forty days gestation an early abortion was less sinful than a later one.¹⁹¹ It is possible that some medieval writers were really giving disguised advice when they condemned contraceptive practices, though Audrey Eccles thinks this is unlikely in the sixteenth century.¹⁹² What is clear is that some people did attempt to prevent conception,¹⁹³ and

¹⁸⁶ *Byrth of Mankind* ff 68v -69v. For rue and savin, see e.g. John Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass 1992) pp 29, 122

¹⁸⁷ Thomas Bentley's massive book *A Monument for Matrons*, published in 1582, included a section of prayers for women related to childbirth. These covered the actual labour and birth, including prayers for the easing of pain, as well as prayers for the midwife and prayers of thanksgiving after a satisfactory delivery. Colin B. Atkinson and William P. Stoneman, "These griping greefes and pinching pangs": attitudes to Childbirth in Thomas Bentley's *The Monument of Matrones* (1582)' *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21 (1990) pp193-203

¹⁸⁸ See e.g. Vives, *Instruction*, sig. fi v.; Edward More, *The Defence of Women* (1560) sig. B v. has a similar comment. Bullinger reminded women that they should consider fruitfulness a divine blessing, despite the suffering they must endure. *Commendation of Matrimony*. chap.18

¹⁸⁹ Riddle cites a case from Montaignou. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion* p. 144

¹⁹⁰ Riddle, *op. cit.* pp. 154 - 157

¹⁹¹ Riddle, *op. cit.* p. 111 - 112

¹⁹² Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology* pp. 67 - 68

¹⁹³ Katherine Howard claimed knowledge of methods of contraception. P.R.O.

if they failed in that, attempted to prevent birth, since the practices were condemned.¹⁹⁴ Raynald is not explicit but hints at this when he fears that his book could be wickedly misapplied to 'some dyvelysse and lewd use'.¹⁹⁵ Erasmus, alone among the writers considered here, openly mentions both contraception and abortion but only to condemn them, claiming little moral distinction between them.¹⁹⁶

Raynald and the other writers must have been aware that the dangers of childbirth did not stop with the actual delivery. Queen Jane Seymour for instance survived her travail, only to succumb ten days later to puerperal fever.¹⁹⁷ However Raynald gives little advice to the midwife about dealing with such a problem. He does suggest remedies to deal with post-partum pains, for instance linen bags of herbal decoctions to put in the vagina, but these, together with the degree of manipulation advised for dealing with the birth, could only have increased the chance of infection. Unfortunately for the mothers it would be centuries before the cause of puerperal fever would be identified.¹⁹⁸

Assuming that the mother did have (in the words of Thomas More to Margaret Roper) 'an easy and happy childbirth'¹⁹⁹ various traditional rituals were observed. The writers considered here had little to say about baptism, lying in and churching.²⁰⁰ They did though give advice on nursing the baby. All who mention it,

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¹⁹⁴ Susan Dwyer Amussen believes that 'abortion was more common than has hitherto been acknowledged' by historians. Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford 1988) p 115 n.50

¹⁹⁵ *Byrth of Mankind*. sig. Cii r.

¹⁹⁶ Erasmus, *Laude and Praise of Matrimony* sig. Ciiii v Robert Schnucker suggests that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Puritan clergy deliberately rejected birth control, on the grounds that to do so would limit the number of the elect, and also that childbearing preserved women from punishment for Eve's sin. Robert Schnucker 'Elizabethan Birth Control and Puritan Attitudes' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 5 (1975)

¹⁹⁷ Antonia Fraser, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (London 1992) p. 280

¹⁹⁸ Edward Shorter, *Women's Bodies*, pp. 103 - 138

¹⁹⁹ Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, p.189

²⁰⁰ For the increasingly controversial subject of churching see Coster, William 'Purity, Profanity and Puritanism; the Churching of Women 1500-1700' in Sheils, W. J. and Wood, Diana, *Women in the Church* (Studies in Church History vol. 27 Oxford 1990); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford) 1997 pp.197-229. Such slight reference as there is to churching in the material studied here indicates that it had not yet become contentious.

advised the mother to suckle her own child, Raynald commenting that the mother's milk is most wholesome for the child.²⁰¹ Whether this comment was based on folklore, or on the observation that children fed by their own mothers thrived better, he does not say. He will not have known of the immunity that a breast-feeding mother conveys to her child, but he may have observed such effects in his practice as a physician. Realistically however the advice writers knew of the distaste felt by upper class families for the mother suckling her own babies, so they took pains to point out the necessary qualifications for a good wet nurse.

It is instructive to compare the advice given by Vives and Raynald on this topic. Vives emphasised the moral qualities of the good wet nurse, because of the belief that the nurse's temperament would pass to the child in the milk. For this reason Vives said he was more concerned that care should be taken to choose a virtuous nurse for a girl than for a boy.²⁰² Like Vives, Raynald believed that undesirable traits could pass in the milk from nurse to infant. However in the five points he listed to be sought in a good nurse, only one related to her morals, and this came fourth on the list. All the other points were physical, and could be summed up by saying that the wetnurse should be in good health and have ample milk.²⁰³

Childbearing and childrearing were of prime concern to many women for much of their lives, but none the less most women would have other occupations to fill their lives as well. The concern shown by Vives and other writers about both women's academic education and their domestic skills is evidence of this, and demonstrates that even great ladies were not supposed to be idle. Idleness indeed was condemned by Vives in terms very similar to the traditional 'Satan finds . . .' when he said that 'the dyvilles subtilte never cometh more soner than in idelnes'.²⁰⁴ Vives gave little detail of what he considers woman's occupation to be, though in terms of her household he argued that 'the man getteth, the woman saveth and kepeth'.²⁰⁵ Vives believed strongly, and literally, that the woman's place was in the home, citing Aristotle to say that it was not fitting for her to know what went on outside her

²⁰¹ *Byrth of Mankind* f. 111v.

²⁰² Vives, *Instruction*, sig. Bi v.

²⁰³ *Byrth of Mankind* f. 112r.

²⁰⁴ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. G r.

²⁰⁵ Vives, *Instruction* sig. K r.

house.²⁰⁶ However Vives accepted reluctantly that some women must work for their livings outside the home, such as 'those that buy and sell'. His advice to such working women concerned the preservation of their chastity: it was better to be chaste than to make a profit. Women who deliberately used their sexuality to tempt male customers were no better than harlots.²⁰⁷

Vives was more at ease with woman's role as mistress of the household. As a hostess she must tread the fine line between 'measure and avaryce, and soberness and nygardeshyppe'.²⁰⁸ With regard to her servants she should treat them gently, like a mother rather than a mistress, but she should require high standards both of service and behaviour. She must set her maids a good example of modesty, sobriety and diligence, and keep her eye on them while they worked. The men servants though should as far as possible be the responsibility of the master of the house, and wherever possible she should follow his orders²⁰⁹

As well as supervising her servants, the housewife needed to act as doctor to the household, making her own remedies and medicines where possible for everyday ailments. Vives' list of 'such diseases as come often' includes coughs, gnawings in the belly, constipation, headache, and 'bones out of joynt'. Her medical skills should also include knowledge of foods and whether or not they are wholesome, and this he suggested she should learn from 'sad and wyse women' and not from (male) physicians. As always with Vives, the protection of chastity must be remembered. The housewife's role of doctor was of course well established and Vives was being realistic about women's actual work here.²¹⁰

Vives wrote mainly for ladies (as opposed to mere women), and gave only general comments about the work they should do. Thomas Tusser wrote for what he called 'housewives' by which he meant wives who were actively involved in their husbands' farm work, outside as well as in the house. Tusser's book began life in 1557 as *One Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, designed for farmers. Over

²⁰⁶ Vives, *Instruction* c. iii v.

²⁰⁷ Vives, *Instruction* sig. d r.

²⁰⁸ Vives, *Instruction* sig. e r.

²⁰⁹ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. eii r.

²¹⁰ Vives, *Instruction* sig. f v.; see e.g. Alison Sim, *The Tudor Housewife* (Stroud 1996) pp.78 - 93; the first chapter of Gervase Markham's *The English Housewife* of 1615 dealt with medicines and methods of dealing with illness. Gervase Markham *The English Housewife*, ed Michael R. Best (Montreal 1986)

various editions 'one hundred' grew to 'five hundred' and a section on the good housewife was incorporated from 1562.²¹¹ Tusser made some moral comments, but most of his book was straightforward practical advice.²¹² He warned the young couple of the need to agree together if they wanted a happy marriage, and warned them of the costs of children, a point not made by the more moralist writers. Though his tone is not generally misogynistic he does make a sharp comment about the unfortunate man who 'pincheth and spareth' to save money to leave for his wife, only to have her spend it wastefully the moment he dies. The bulk of the book describes the tasks the farmer and his wife must carry out, based on the routine of the farming year. The wife's responsibilities included maintaining the garden, where her tasks included planting strawberries and protecting them from frost, and providing winter food for the bees in her hive ²¹³

The dairy was also part of the woman's domain. The husband was responsible for the good cows and the good pasture, but it was up to the wife to provide the butter and cheese. The dairy maid also needed supervision, and Tusser like Vives stressed the wife's duty to control her servants.²¹⁴ Another of the wife's necessary tasks, which reveals a more sordid side of Tudor life, was gathering wormwood seed and saving it to spread over the floors when they were swept in March, to act as a flea repellent. Other seeds were gathered (mustard and hemp are mentioned) and the good housewife saved some of the seed to sow again in the spring. Tusser encouraged the farmer and his wife to exchange surplus seeds with their neighbours.²¹⁵ The country wife was expected to play her full part in the life of the farm, and Tusser also expected her to be involved in the community. Tusser's good housewife, unlike Vives' good wife, did not spend the bulk of her time sequestered within her house. The housewife too should be chaste and virtuous, but Tusser did

²¹¹ See Joan Larsen Klein, ed. *Daughters, Wives and Widows*, for a printing history of Tusser. Klein prints a full version of the *Book of Houswifery*, based of a collation of the 1573, 1577 and 1580 editions. She does not include the verses about housewifery from the main '*Husbandry*' text.

²¹² The references from the 'Husbandry' section are from Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry, . . . together with A Book of Huswifery* ed. William Mavor, (London 1812)

²¹³ Tusser, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 34, 63, 64, 140

²¹⁴ Tusser, *op. cit.*, p. 140

²¹⁵ Tusser, *op. cit.* pp.172, 182

not consider this to be incompatible with her playing an active role in her household and the world around her.

Not all marriages of course turned out happily. Divorce in the modern sense was impossible: what sixteenth century English law called 'divorce' corresponded to the modern legal separation, with no right of remarriage for either partner. There were of course exceptions, King Henry VIII being the most obvious example, though his marriages were ended by annulment rather than divorce.²¹⁶ Divorce was clearly an issue at this time, but it was given little attention by these writers. Erasmus made Eulalia and Xantippe discuss divorce, with Xantippe bemoaning the fact that divorce had been allowed in ancient times but was allowed no longer, until Eulalia silenced her by reminding her that Christ himself had forbidden it. Only Bullinger gave much consideration to the subject. He accepted that divorce was available as a medicine for a diseased marriage, but warned that like other medical treatments such as amputation, it was perilous. He accepted that divorce could be permissible in the case of adultery or whoredom (by the woman may be understood), and added that St Paul had allowed the remarriage of the innocent party in such cases. Considering the law of his own times, he accused the papists of causing whoredom by forbidding remarriage after divorce, and he clearly felt that the innocent party should be allowed to remarry.²¹⁷

Such might indeed have become the law of England had the *Reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum* of 1552-53 been accepted by Parliament. A section of this scheme to reform ecclesiastical law dealt with marriage, adultery and divorce. The *Reformatio* was severe on adultery, proposing life imprisonment or perpetual banishment for a woman who was an adulterer, together with deprivation of her dowry and any benefits she might be due to receive from her husband. A guilty husband would be punished with the forfeiture of half his goods, plus the obligation to return half of his wife's dowry. On the question of divorce however the *Reformatio* was liberal. Firstly, the innocent spouse in a case of adultery was permitted to remarry. Secondly, divorce with the right to remarry was also to be granted in certain

²¹⁶ Eric Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (Oxford 1986) pp. 404-406; David Loades, *The Politics of Marriage: Henry VIII and his Queens* (Stroud 1994) p. 88

²¹⁷ Bullinger, *Christen State of Matrimony*, ch. 25

other cases. These were desertion,²¹⁸ 'deadly hostility' which meant attempted murder, and persistent violence from husband to wife. The *Reformatio* also proposed that the traditional divorce *ab mensa et thoro*, which it accused of introducing 'an accumulation of evils into matrimony', should be abolished. Unfortunately for deserted wives, the *Reformatio* never became law, because of the opposition of the Duke of Northumberland.²¹⁹ Following this, it was not until the nineteenth century that divorce became anything like accessible to the ordinary Englishman.²²⁰

For most women though marriage was happy or at least tolerable, and occupied a substantial part of their lives. The making of a marriage, as has been seen, attracted much attention from the writers studied here. The great majority of marriages continued 'until death us depart', and in many of those cases it was the death of the husband that ended the marriage. However relatively little attention was paid to widowhood by these writers, though some made passing comments.²²¹ Only two of these books pay much attention to the situation of widows. One of these is Vives' *Instruction*, where a section is devoted to widows, and the other is Robert Copland's *Seven Sorrows that Women have when theyr Husbands be Dead*. Copland's title might at first sight appear to be a devout treatise on the widow and her mourning, but it is in fact a satirical consideration of this subject.²²²

Copland's *Seven Sorrows* purports to tell the story of a newly widowed woman, from the point that her husband lay dying. The wife wept as she should, while her husband was coffined and borne to the church, but her tears were caused (Copland suggests) less by her grief than by her pinching shoe, her tight bodice, or

²¹⁸ The deserting spouse was to be given notice to present himself (or herself) and allowed a period of two to three years to do so before the divorce would take effect.

²¹⁹ James C. Spalding, ed. *The Reformation of the Ecclesiastical Laws of England, 1552* (Kirksville 1992) pp. 41-42, 99 - 106

²²⁰ It was indeed not until the twentieth century that women had the same rights as men regarding divorce. The grounds which marked the English divorce law for much of the twentieth century, adultery, desertion and cruelty, were basically the same as those cited by the *Reformatio*.

²²¹ e.g. Sir Thomas Elyot in *The Defence of Good Women* described Zenobia ruling justly as a widow. Foster Watson Ed. *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, (London 1912) p. 235

²²² Robert Copland, *The Seven Sorrows that Women have when theyr Husbands be Deade* (1526)

even the onion which she carried as a preventative against fainting.²²³ In the church though her outward behaviour was appropriate, the new widow's mind wandered, more concerned with the cost of the Requiem mass ('for this xi shylynges and for that xi penens') than with mourning her husband. The widow's attractions were discussed by the men of the town, who were soon offering gifts, jewels or food, trying to persuade her into marriage.²²⁴

At this point though the widow paused to reflect on her situation. Should she marry again, or remain a widow? There were advantages to both positions, and Copland set out some of them. As a widow her chief blessing would be freedom.

I commaunde other but none commaundeth me
And eke I stande at myne owne liberte²²⁵

The widow was still young though, and felt the temptations of the flesh.

And unto me it is full hard to cease
The wanton delite, that younge women have²²⁶

She was also aware that the constant stream of suitors visiting her house posed a threat to her reputation. Both of these problems would be remedied by marriage. Finally though Copland's widow decides in favour of the freedom of widowhood, with the assurance that her person and her possessions were safe from a husband who might beat her or sell her goods. Copland's tone was satirical and at times critical of the woman, but he ended gently with a resolution by the widow to fulfill her husband's wish by repairing a causeway which he had determined to mend before his death. Copland expressed his wish that the widows among his readers would take his poem as a 'pastime', and the final scene of his poem could be seen as an apology²²⁷

Vives, the other writer to devote serious attention to widows, also considers the proposition that a woman is better off as a widow than as a wife. He dismisses this proposition very quickly, reflecting that a woman without her husband is like a ship without a rudder, 'wandrynge without order and reason'²²⁸. However Vives was ambivalent about the remarriage of widows. He accepted that to deny the right of widows to remarry at all, was heresy, but he would much prefer widows to live out

²²³ Copland, *op. cit.* sigs. Aiii v.; Aiv v.; Bi r

²²⁴ Copland, *op. cit.* sigs. Bi v.; Bii r; Ci v.; Cii r.; Ciii v.

²²⁵ Copland, *Seven Sorows*, sig. Ciii v.

²²⁶ *loc. cit.*

²²⁷ Copland, *Seven Sorows*, sig. Civ v.

²²⁸ Vives sig k iv v.

the rest of their lives in chastity. The only exception he made was for very young widows, where he recommended marriage as the lesser evil.²²⁹ Where the young widow could not avoid lust, and therefore should marry, Vives recommended a man past middle age, 'sober, sad' and of wisdom and discretion. It might seem that such a man might not appeal to the lustful young woman, but Vives was concerned that the second husband should be able to rule both house and wife.²³⁰

Vives is conforming here to the stereotype of the widow as highly sexed, courted by men and 'silly in her independence'. The stereotype, expressed particularly in the drama, also claimed that widows tended to remarry, and that older widows married younger men, the motive of the men being greed or ambition.²³¹ There was also a myth that widows remarried indecently soon, summed up by the proverb 'a widow's sorrow for her husband is like a pain in the elbow - sharp but short'.²³² In fact if anything it was widowers who married in indecent haste. Erasmus was aware of possible criticism when he described his friend 'Mauricius' (Thomas More) remarrying 'the next monethe after' his first wife died. Erasmus excused More on the grounds that More 'thought hys lyfe no lyfe without a wyfe'.²³³

Instead of remarrying, Vives urged the widow to live in quiet, modest retirement. This should be demonstrated by her dress, which should be even more restrained than a maid's. Even where a woman had dressed gaily as a wife, to please her husband, as a widow she should avoid all such 'trymmynge and arrayynge of her bodye'. In an extraordinary comment he accused the widow who wore 'goodly rayment' of betraying her spouse Christ, and being 'wydowe, wife and aduterer'.²³⁴ It is not surprising therefore that he also urged the widow to avoid all outings of pleasure, and to concentrate instead on works of piety, though even here he urged her

²²⁹ Vives follows St Paul, *I Corinthians* 7, vv. 8-9, but Paul does not qualify the age of the widows when advising that 'it is better to marry than to burn'. Vives, *Instruction*, sig. n iv r.

²³⁰ Vives, *Instruction*, loc. cit.

²³¹ Charles Carlton 'The Widow's Tale: Male Myths and Female Reality in 16th and 17th Century England' *Albion*, 10/2 (1978) pp. 118-129

²³² Carlton, op. cit. p. 120

²³³ Erasmus, *In Laude and Prayse of Matrimony*, sig. Dv r. But see Richard Marius *Thomas More*, p. 42, and p. 47 above

²³⁴ Vives, *Instruction*, sig. m r.

to avoid the busy church she might previously have attended, and seek out a quiet unfrequented place in which to worship.²³⁵

Vives conceded that the widow might perforce have to conduct business, and would probably have to supervise her household and the upbringing of her children. To protect her vulnerable chastity he advised reducing the size of her household, and particularly limiting the number of men she employed. To those widows who were unable to avoid a large household, Vives recommended employing a steward, but he should be a 'well-aged man . . . sad and discreet'. This was essential, to avoid the risks of jealousy among the servants, and the widow's risk of gaining an 'ill name'.²³⁶ He warned of the danger of the ambitious young steward who knew he was loved by his mistress. The fictional example of Malvolio comes to mind, but the actual example of Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, and her steward (and second husband) Richard Bertie shows that Vives may have had some cause for his anxiety.²³⁷

While Vives expected the widow to live quietly and dress soberly, he did not advise extravagance in her mourning. Tears, within reason, were right and proper, but wild grief was not. It was in fact a sign that the widow lacked faith in the resurrection and her ultimate reunion with her husband. In an interesting reflection on priestly practices, Vives urged priests to reassure young widows that they would be reunited with their husbands after death, rather than to comfort them with the promise that they would soon find a new husband. Similarly Vives rejected the building of expensive funerary monuments, and urged that the wife give her husband's money for alms for the poor rather than for 'waxe and costly sepultures'.²³⁸

It would be appropriate, especially as Vives' *Instruction* has been the continuing thread through this chapter, to finish this account of the woman's life cycle as seen by a group of sixteenth century authors with Vives once more. Rather than his criticism of the extravagant widow, this account of the 'image' of the Tudor woman will end with Vives's gentle comments about 'a wyfe well worn in age'. With her childbearing and child rearing accomplished, and the pleasures of the body no longer of any interest, the old wife should turn her mind towards heaven: 'lyfte up all

²³⁵ Vives, *op. cit.*, sigs. m i v.; m iv v.

²³⁶ Vives, *op. cit.* sigs. m iii v.; m iv r.

²³⁷ Evelyn Read, *Catherine Duchess of Suffolk*, (London 1961) p.92

²³⁸ Vives, *Instruction*, sigs. l i v. - l iv v.

her senses, her thoughts and her mynde unto God, and prepare and apply herself hollye to her journey'. At this last stage of her life, her husband should place her in authority in his household, and she should spare her body needless suffering. She should fast less (now the flesh does not have to be subdued), and not weary herself with 'walkyng about unto churches' to make her devotions. Instead, at this last stage of her life, Vives' aged woman should content herself with giving good advice. At last, now her life is drawing to its close, the woman who has been urged for so long to keep silent, is urged to speak out.²³⁹ Vives shows no sense of the irony of this situation.

²³⁹ Vives, *Instruction*, sigs. K i v. - K ii v.

Chapter Three

Women and the Law

Part One Common Law and Statute: the theoretical picture

Women . . . have nothing to do in constituting lawes, or consenting to them, in interpreting of lawes, or hearing them interpreted at lectures, leets or charges, and yet they stand strictly tyed to mens establishments.¹

These words of a Jacobean lawyer sum up part of the problem relating to early modern laws regarding women. Women were, like men, bound by the law. But unlike men they had no part in formulating or interpreting it. The closely inter-related political and legal 'professions' were exclusively male. The law saw women, and matters regarding women, from a male standpoint. This is the conventional view, and in many respects gives an accurate representation of the position, certainly with regard to elite women

The quotation above is taken from the first account of English law relating to women, *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights or the Lawes Provision for Woemen* [sic]. The book's origins are somewhat obscure. It was registered at Stationers' Hall in 1632 by Thomas Edgar, and the epistle to the reader is signed 'T E.' who may reasonably be assumed to be the same person.² 'T E' claimed to be merely the editor of the *Lawes Resolutions*, having taken someone else's work, written long before (and also anonymously) and amended and augmented it to the greater benefit of the reader. Certainly many examples are used which post date the latter years of Elizabeth's reign when the bulk of the book was supposed to have been written. From the present point of view the authorship of the *Lawes Resolution* is a curiosity but does not affect the utility of the source. It will also be noted that the

¹ T. E. *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights or the Lawes Provision for Woemen* (London 1632) p. 2 [hereafter cited as *Lawes Resolutions*]

² A Thomas Edgar, who was admitted as a member of Gray's Inn in 1619, and passed a 'moderately successful' though provincial legal career, may be the same person. Prest suggests that Edgar (or T.E. if he was not the same person) may have used the 'revision of someone else's work' argument to protect himself from the appearance of presumption. W.R. Prest. 'Law and Women's Rights in early modern England' *The Seventeenth Century* vol. VI no. 2 (1991) pp. 173-175

date of publication, 1632, is well beyond the date boundaries used for this thesis. However it is felt that the *Lawes Resolution*, as the nearest thing available to a contemporary account of women's legal position, is too valuable not to be used here.

The Lawes Resolution of Womens Rights concentrates on the position of women in the common law, and especially on the position of women regarding property, points which make it of particular relevance regarding elite women, although weakening its value as concerns 'ordinary women'. The tone is set in the first few pages with the listing of the 'seven ages of woman', all of which clearly relate to the woman of property.

At 7 her father shall have aid of his tenants to marry her
At 9 she is able to 'deserve and have dowre'
At 12 she is able to consent to marriage
At 14 to be 'hors du garde'
At 16 to be past the Lord's tender of a husband
At 21 to be able to make a feoffment³

T E expands on some of these points, explaining for example that a father may seek a feudal aid for only his eldest daughter, and that a girl who is a ward may not have her lands kept from her after the age of sixteen because the lord 'covetously' refuses to arrange a marriage for her, but that the lord may keep her lands until she is twenty-one if she 'maliciously' refuses a suitable marriage he offers her⁴ It is clear from all this that 'T E' is looking backward to an earlier stage of the common law. Feudal aids for the marriage of daughters did not play a significant role in the period when he was writing

Marriage, it will be noted, plays a key part in the seven ages, and much of T E's book concerns the law relating to marriage, or to its consequences. Early modern lawyers were no different from their contemporary scholars, philosophers or theologians in seeing marriage as a woman's natural condition.⁵ The first stage of marriage was the spousals, or *sponsalia*. This could be mere words, or words accompanied by a token as a pledge of intent (as with the modern engagement ring). The words could be said by anyone over the age of seven, though in fact the normal age of consent was 12 for a girl and 14 for a boy, and a young person could reject

³ *Lawes Resolutions*, 7; F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland *The History of English Law before the time of Edward I* (Cambridge 1895) [hereafter cited as Pollock and Maitland] gives a similar list, vol. 2, p. 437

⁴ *Lawes Resolutions* pp. 8, 16

⁵ See Chapter Two for more on this point

spousals made while still below the age of consent.⁶ Spousals could be made in public before witnesses, or in private, though as T.E. reasonably observed private spousals, difficult or impossible to prove, were 'little esteemed' and public spousals were to be preferred, and could even override private spousals.⁷ Another important difference was that between spousals *per verba de praesenti* and those *per verba de futuro*. Spousals in the present tense constituted a marriage, whereas those made in the future tense did not and could be broken, unless they had been followed by sexual consummation. Because spousals amounted to a public contract, they could not be undone without 'public authority', unless the cause was 'so well knowne that it needeth neither prooffe nor sentence, such as fornication when it is notorious'. Besides notorious fornication, spousals could be broken off if one of the parties contracted a disease such as leprosy which made them 'unfit for generation'. If the parties contracted did not marry, the spousals could be considered to lapse after two years (or three years if one party lived in another 'province')⁸

Because spousals could constitute a marriage, a problem arose when a person who had made a previous spousal contract wanted to marry someone else. The question of whether Henry Percy and Anne Boleyn had made a contract of marriage illustrates this, and also the difficulty of proving such a contract.⁹ The church had apparently sometimes claimed that marriages which had been made, consummated and produced children, were nevertheless unlawful because of the existence of a pre-contract. In 1540 Parliament, claiming that the church under the control of the Bishop of Rome had by 'an unjust law' divorced people who were truly married, on the grounds of precontract, declared that where a couple were lawfully married with their marriage 'solemnised in the face of the churche' and had their marriage consummated with 'bodily knowledge or fruite of childerne or child being had therein' between them, then that was a true marriage. Any previous contract, not so consummated, could be ignored.¹⁰ Not entirely surprisingly, this act was abused. In 1548 Parliament, while accepting that the law had been 'godly meant', yet admitted that 'the unrulynes of men hath ungodlye abused the same'. Both women and men

⁶ *Laws Resolutions* p. 52 Pollock and Maitland, vol. 2, pp. 387-8

⁷ *Laws Resolutions* p. 54

⁸ *Laws Resolutions* p. 56

⁹ See below pp. 190, 198-99

¹⁰ 32 Hen. VIII c. 38, *Statutes* vol. 3, p. 792

were 'so sett upon sensualite and pleasure' that if 'they might have [someone] whom they more favored and desyred' they were abandoning their first contract to marry someone else. The Act claimed that people were even abandoning their spouses 'even from the verie Churche doore and Marriage feast' to take another, 'more for bodylie luste and carnall knowledge then for suertye of faythe and trueth'. To prevent this the provisions of the 1540 act relating to precontract were repealed.¹¹

There were of course restrictions on those who could marry. It was necessary to be of sound and whole mind, and T.E. stresses here that the deaf and dumb were allowed to marry. Marriage with kindred was forbidden by God, and there were also restrictions on those connected by affinity, but by T E 's time the wilder fancies of the medieval law of affinity had been discarded, and as he said a father and son may marry a mother and daughter ¹² The 1540 Act also dealt briefly with this question, criticising the church for setting up restrictions in order to make money by dispensing from them. Marriages might not be made by force, nor by some wickedness (such as the murder of a first wife to marry a second) but marriage between a ravisher and his victim was lawful ¹³ Traditionally the law of the church was that a marriage was valid if made in words of the present tense (*per verba de praesenti*), or if made in the future tense (*per verba de futuro*) provided it was then consummated. The parents' consent was not relevant, though the young couple were not considered capable of giving their own proper consent unless they were of age, that is 12 and 14. Ironically even a religious ceremony was not actually a necessary part of the marriage in the eyes of canon law. In practice this contractual marriage came to be seen as clandestine, and a religious ceremony properly carried out became regarded as an essential. The English common law did not accord property rights to spouses unless there was a public ceremony, and the Council of Trent in 1563 also made a public ceremony a requirement. The Council of Trent did not insist on parental consent, though the law of France for example made it obligatory for men of under 30 or women under 25. In England, because of the failure to amend the canon law of marriage at the Reformation, private contractual marriages remained lawful, a

¹¹ 2 & 3 Ed. VI c. 23, *Statutes* vol. 4, p. 68

¹² See Pollock and Maitland vol. 2, pp. 383-387 for a critical account of the medieval laws of kindred and affinity

¹³ *Laws Resolutions* pp. 58-60

situation that did not change until the Marriage Act of 1753, although they were not recognised by common law, A marriage without the parents' consent remained lawful, if clandestine, but as Lawrence Stone says, parents did have the 'power of the purse' at their disposal.¹⁴

As might be expected, much of the *Laws Resolution* concerns the property aspects of marriage. At marriage the wife became in a sense subsumed into her husband, a situation called in law French 'coverture'. She was known as *feme covert*, as opposed to the single or widowed woman who was *feme sole*. The aristocratic origin of this is made clear by the legal expression *baron and feme*, meaning simply husband and wife. As would be expected this state of coverture had profound implications for a woman's property, but to sum it up briefly here, under the common law the wife had no property of her own separate from her husband during the period of their marriage. T.E. stressed that the coverture began at the point of the public celebration of the nuptials, since this made a marriage in the eyes of the law: '*consensus nec concubitus facit matrimonium*'. If a woman died after the betrothal but before the marriage, the man had no right of inheritance to her property. On the other hand if a man died after the marriage ceremony but before consummation, the wife normally still had her right of dower.¹⁵

It should be noted that while the wife's property came under the husband's control during the coverture, he did not automatically become her heir. This is made clear by the existence of the 'tenancy by the courtesy' or 'the courtesy of England'. If the wife died childless following the marriage, the property she brought with her reverted to her own heirs. If however a child was born and lived sufficiently long to cry, the husband obtained the right to a life interest in his wife's property. The medieval lawyer Bracton stressed that the child must cry naturally, for to make some other noise suggested a monster, not a child who could become the heir.¹⁶ Pollock and Maitland suggest the term 'courtesy of England' is a comparison of English law with the law of Normandy, which will have been familiar to the lawyers of the thirteenth century who first described this custom. In Norman law a widowed

¹⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce*, (Oxford 1990) pp 53-58

¹⁵ *Laws Resolutions* pp.117-8

¹⁶ As T.E. humourously put it, 'if it belowed, bleated, brayed, grunted rored or howled, there accrued no courtesie by getting such an uncivill urchin'.

husband had a similar right of *veufete* (*viduitas*) but this was lost if he remarried, whereas the English husband had a lifetime right to his late wife's property even if he married again.¹⁷

Even at the point of marriage the possibility of widowhood was considered. There was a long established custom by which the husband assigned his wife dower, a sum of money or an amount of land, on their wedding day at the church door. This would support her during her widowhood. By common law the wife was entitled to a third of the husband's possessions, but this amount was not fixed, and would be overridden by a church door settlement. If a wife accepted less than her 'widow's thirds' this was still a valid agreement. In some places there were local customs or laws fixing the amount, usually more generously.¹⁸ A widow's right to financial provision was accepted in the Statute of Wills of 1540, which gave a landowner the right to dispose of two thirds of his lands as he pleased, 'for the advancement of his wife, preferment of his children and payment of his dettes, or otherwise at his will and pleasure'. The widow's dower rights were specifically protected by this statute.¹⁹

By the time T E wrote, as he observed, dower was becoming old fashioned. It was becoming more usual in the sixteenth century for a wife to receive a jointure, which was related to the portion given with the bride by her family when she married. In effect, the bride's father was buying her future security, and the sizes of portion and jointure were usually linked. By Elizabeth's reign the jointure was usually around ten percent of the portion. If the portion failed to appear, as when Mary Talbot married Henry Percy, the widow might have difficulty in maintaining her claim to her jointure. In some cases lands were specifically purchased with the portion, to provide the jointure without harming the main estate.²¹ During the marriage the income from the lands supported the couple, and on her widowhood the money would provide for the

¹⁷ *Lawes Resolutions* pp 79-88, Pollock and Maitland vol. 2, p. 413

¹⁸ *Lawes Resolutions* pp 107, 111

¹⁹ 32 Hen VIII c 1 *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 3, 746

²⁰ Maria Lynn Cioni, *Women and Law in Elizabethan England with particular reference to the Court of Chancery*, (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Cambridge 1974) p 196

²¹ Land might also be allocated from the main estate for the jointure, as Painswick was allocated for Honor Lisle's jointure. See below pp. 109, 113-114

widow. The jointure system could be applied to copyhold or leasehold lands as well as freehold, whereas common law dower rights applied only to freeholds.²²

The Statute of Uses of 1535 decreed that a woman could not have both jointure and dower. If she was for some lawful reason expelled from her jointure lands she would be entitled to dower equivalent to the same amount of land. She could also refuse her jointure and claim instead her common law dower rights (presumably if this was a better deal) but only if the jointure was agreed after the marriage. T E. queried whether a woman could receive dower if her husband had also bequeathed lands to her in his will. He considered the case doubtful, but inclined to the view that she could not have both.²³

Jointure rights were normally absolute, but in some cases they could be made for life only, and still be valid. Moreover certain acts by a woman could lead to her forfeiting either dower or jointure. Local custom might state that a woman could have dower only if she remained a widow.²⁴ In certain circumstances adultery would also cause a woman to lose her dower rights. Mere infidelity of itself would not do this, but 'elopement' would: if the wife ran away with her lover to some other place and lived with him there. In this case she lost her dower rights unless her husband voluntarily took her back, without being compelled to do so by the church. T.E. commented with some irony on the inequality of the law's treatment of husband and wife. The husband could 'lope over ditch and dale, a thousand out-ridings and outbiddings' and suffer no forfeiture of his lands, but one running off by the wife and she would lose everything.²⁵ There were other ways in which the wife could lose her dower rights, and with heavy irony T E suggested that the husband who has a 'notable grudge' against his wife might consider the ultimate revenge, committing

²² Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London 1993) p. 25

²³ 27 Anno Hen. VIII c.10 *Statutes of the Realm* vol. III (London 1816-19) pp. 540-541

²⁴ *Laws Resolutions* p.107; see Tim Stretton, 'Women, Custom and Equity in the Court of Requests' in Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker, eds., *Women Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London 1994) for discussion of the effect of local custom on widows' rights.

²⁵ *Laws Resolutions* pp.145-146 However, T.E. said that the belief was that a woman who was ravished and abducted by the ravisher, would not lose her dower rights if she moved in with him unwillingly.

treason, since by this his wife lost her dower. He did not, he hastened to add, actually advise this.²⁶

Once the couple were safely married, as has been said, the wife became a feme covert. She was 'overshadowed with her husbands protection and supereminency', or to use T.E.'s simile she was like a rivulet or stream that flowed into a mighty river, and was absorbed, lost its name, and possessed nothing of its own. T.E. was evidently quite content that a wife should be absorbed like the little stream, but it is clear that he had some respect for women's abilities and understanding.²⁷ All the wife's property, of whatever kind, became her husband's. This applied both to property she brought to the marriage, and property she acquired during marriage, even gifts her husband might give her. 'Her Chaine, her Bracelets, her Apparell, are all the goodmans goods'²⁸ She was however given some protection in certain instances, to protect the long term interests of her property and her heirs. By an act of 1541 husbands were prevented from making leases of any lands they held by right of their wife's inheritance without making her a party to the lease, or at least from prejudicing her rights or those of her heirs²⁹

Since the feme covert had no property of her own, she could not dispose of property, unless her husband agreed. With his consent she could give, sell or charge her husband's chattels, or she could make a valid transfer of chattels if he gave his consent retrospectively. According to statute she could not make a valid will relating to land, and was linked with minors, idiots and those *de non sane memorie* in this.³⁰ With her husband's consent she could make a will relating to other forms of property, but there would often be little point in this. For women who had been married previously however there might be reason to make a will.

Women were allowed to be, and frequently were, executors of their husband's will. Among the women studied in this thesis, Susan Clarentius was named as her

²⁶ *Laws Resolutions* p. 152 This would however seem to be contradicted by 1 Edw VI c.12, the repeal of the Treason Act of 1534, which clearly states that a woman's rights of dower are not affected by her husband's conviction for treason. *Statutes* vol. 4, pp.18-22

²⁷ *Laws Resolutions* pp. 117-118, 124-125

²⁸ *Laws Resolutions* p. 129

²⁹ 32 Hen. VIII c. 28, *Statutes* vol. 3, pp.784-6,

³⁰ 34 & 35 Hen. VIII c. 5, *Statutes* vol. 3, pp. 901-904

husband's executor, as was her friend Frideswide Strelley.³¹ There were financial advantages for the widow in this, since the executor was in effect the residuary legatee, and a clever widow could quite legitimately use the estate's money to supplement her jointure.³² A widow who remarried was allowed to continue with the role of executrix even during coverture. Of the four hundred Yorkshire women whose wills were studied by Claire Cross, only six were married but of those, four had been married more than once. Women in such a situation might use their wills to protect the interests of the children of their first marriage, or simply to dispose independently of money perhaps inherited from the first husband.³³

Following the same logic by which a married woman could not make a will without her husband's consent, she could not make a contract. This would seem to rule out married women taking part in business on their own behalf, but in practice there were ways round this. In some cases women such as Sabine Johnson traded as their husband's agent, the wife carrying out the business though the contract was with the husband. Where the wife was in business on her own behalf many boroughs including London permitted her the status of feme sole trader, by which she became an honorary single woman. She could trade, make contracts and even appear in the borough courts in her own right.³⁴ However in practice this was becoming rare by the mid sixteenth century: a study of working women in Oxford revealed no married women trading in their own right. Women did of course trade together with their husbands, but in this case however much input the wife had in the business, the husband was legally the master.³⁵

³¹ See below pp. 219, 236. Over the early modern period between 63% and 89% of men appointed their wives to be their executors. Erickson, *Women and Property* p. 157.

³² Maria Cioni, 'The Elizabethan Chancery and women's rights' in D.J. Guth and J. W. McKenna, *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G.R. Elton from his American friends*, (Cambridge 1982) p.180.

³³ Claire Cross, 'Northern Women in the early modern period: the female testators of Hull and Leeds 1520-1650' *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* vol 59 (1987)

³⁴ Erickson, *Women and Property* p. 31

³⁵ Mary Prior, 'Women and the urban economy: Oxford 1500-1800' in Mary Prior, ed. *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London 1985) p. 103

Many women experienced their first taste of legal and financial independence only with widowhood. T.E. sympathised with the widow's grief, but then addressing the widow directly added:

Why mourn you so, you that be widowes? Consider how long you have been in subiection under the predominance of parents, of your husband, now you be in libertie, a free proprietor at your own lawe.³⁶

As a widow she was likely to be made her husband's executor, and if he had died intestate she was likely to be given the administration of his estate by the ordinary. If this was the case, the widow had a claim in some places for her 'reasonable part' of his goods and chattels. Under the law in places such as the province of York and the city of London, the first call on a man's estate was for his funeral expenses, and then his possessions were divided into three, one part for the widow, one part for the children, and one part for the man himself to bequeath as he wished.³⁷ If the widow was entitled to dower, this could be assigned immediately if it was *dos nominata*, or dower in specified lands. Otherwise it was supposed to be assigned within forty days, the 'quarantine'. During this period the widow had the right to remain in her husband's principal house, and was protected against being turned out by the heir.

In addition to dower or jointure, the widow would hope to receive what were called her *paraphernalia*, her 'jewels, trinkets and ornaments'. During the marriage the husband could give these away or sell them with the wife having no right to prevent him, but he could not leave them away from her by will, and she would normally receive them as her own property after her husband's death. Strictly speaking under the common law, with the exception of the *paraphernalia*, a husband could bequeath away any of his property (which includes the property the wife brought to the marriage) except the wife's own 'necessary clothes'. Even the *paraphernalia* were not proof against the husband's creditors. A husband might choose to mention these things in his will, though he need not do so. George Talbot, the fourth earl of Shrewsbury, left his second wife and widow a considerable quantity of carefully identified plate and household items, but he also left to her 'owne use wtout interrupcion all manner of Jewells, ryngs, owches, chaines, brochess, gurdills, stones and peerles, which she now hath as specially as and they were enterrd in a

³⁶ *Lawes Resolutions* p. 232

³⁷ Pollock and Maitland vol. 2, p. 346

booke by particuler parcells'. The wording here suggests that the widow was left the jewels which she already wore, and which might have been considered her own.³⁸

The law of dower was complex and T.E. spent much time dealing with its minutiae. The traditional right to 'a third part' raised the question as to what could be assessed for dower, which included such things as the third part of the profits of a fair or a dove-house, or indeed the third part of a villein's labour.³⁹ The last comment again reflects the fact that T.E. was looking at the law in a very traditional and even archaic way. What was perhaps more important was the question of disputes which might arise between the widow and heir over the precise amount of dower to which the widow was entitled. Where she took too much, the heir or his guardian was allowed a writ of admeasurement to claim back the surplus. If on the other hand the husband's goods were insufficient to pay his debts, it was the heir's responsibility to see to this and not to make it a charge on the dower. Because her dower was a life interest only, the widow was urged to keep on the right side of the reversionary heir, and to avoid waste of the estate, such as inappropriate felling of woods. If she did waste the estate, she could be required to make a payment of three times the value of the thing wasted.⁴⁰

As a life tenant, the woman might have seemed in any case unable to alienate any of the lands. However the law on this had become somewhat elastic.

And women, witty of themselves, instructed by crafty men, grew cunning at the last, that they could alien lands, holden for life, in taile, or to whom they listed in fee⁴¹

This was either a real problem, or was perceived to be one, since it was dealt with by the parliament of 1495. The Act against recoveries and discontinuances made by tenant in dower, forbade widows from alienating lands they held as dower or jointure, on pain of forfeiting those lands to the reversionary heir. It was still possible to

³⁸ Pollock and Maitland vol. 2, pp. 402, 426-428; F. Brodhurst, 'The will of George Talbot, 4th Earl of Shrewsbury', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 31 (1909) pp. 73-88; Pollock and Maitland vol. 2, pp. 402, 426-428; F. Brodhurst, 'The will of George Talbot, 4th Earl of Shrewsbury', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 31 (1909) pp. 73-88

³⁹ *Laws Resolutions* pp. 279-285

⁴⁰ *Laws Resolutions* pp. 287-289, 307-308

⁴¹ *Laws Resolutions* p. 314

alienate with the heir's permission, or indeed for the widow to alienate for her own life time only.⁴²

There was some interest in this period in whether it was appropriate for a widow to remarry, although in practice many did.⁴³ T.E. restricted his comments on this to a consideration of the position if a widow remarried while pregnant. Before remarrying, he suggested, she should 'examine well whether the panner be empty, or no'. If she did marry while carrying her previous husband's child (something T.E. considered 'wanton') the child's position was doubtful. Sir Thomas Smith had believed the child would be the heir of the new husband, not the previous one, though T.E. himself doubted this. A further consideration for a widow contemplating remarriage was whether she was the widow of a tenant *in capite* and counted as one of the 'king's widows' If she was she needed a royal licence to remarry. The new Court of Wards set up in 1540 took over the king's rights with regard to widows as well as wards, and was given the power to investigate the King's widows and tax those who had not obtained a licence to remarry, and also those who did so in the future.⁴⁴

Not all of the *Lawes Resolution* dealt with the property rights of women. There were certain other areas of the law that related specifically to women, notably the law regarding rape. The law regarding rape, or ravishment, was broad and included what would now be considered abduction. T.E. divided the law into two parts, one corresponding to the modern offence, which he categorised as 'a hideous hatefull kinde of whoredome' when a woman is 'enforced violently to sustaine the furie of brutish concupiscence', but is left in her own home, the other when she is abducted. He considered the 'old law of libidinous rape' from its Saxon roots to the establishment of the death penalty as the usual punishment by the second Statute of Westminster 1285 even where the woman herself 'was content not to sue'.⁴⁵ A man

⁴² 11 Hen. VII cap. 20: *Statutes of the Realm*, vol 2, p. 583

⁴³ See above pp. 65-67

⁴⁴ *Lawes Resolutions* pp. 328-9; 32 Hen. VIII c. 46, *Statutes* vol 3, p. 805

⁴⁵ In Saxon and Norman times the perpetrator of rape was blinded and castrated, but for his guilt to be proved the woman had to prove that she had been a virgin, and had not consented to his 'imbracements'. Early in the reign of Edward I the penalty was reduced to only two years imprisonment. Despite the immediate assumption that this law was placing little value on women, T.E. suggests that the old law had fallen into abeyance so that this was actually a tougher regime than previously. *Lawes Resolutions* pp. 377-382; Pollock and Maitland vol. 2, pp. 488-490

could offer defences against a charge of rape, on the grounds of consent. If the woman was his concubine, that was a defence against rape, but not if she was someone else's mistress, or even a harlot, in other words it was not legally necessary for a woman to have a spotless reputation to bring a charge of rape, though the practice may have been rather different. The man could not claim that she had consented if her consent was caused by fear of death. He could however successfully defend himself if she became pregnant, because 'none can conceive without consent'. Although T.E. cites this truism apparently seriously, he may not entirely have believed it. He quotes a rather curious case where a woman was raped and abducted, bore her ravisher a child and lived with him for seven years. She then escaped and took her case to parliament. She was asked how she could say she had never assented since she had had a child, and gave the ingenious answer that 'her flesh consented to him, but her soule and conscience did ever abhorre him' ⁴⁶

The question of consent was also relevant when the rape of children was considered. A case of the sexual assault of a seven year old girl in 1572-3 had raised the question whether so young a child could actually be raped although 'divers matrons' attested to this. It would also be argued that if she could not legally consent, perhaps she was also unable to withhold consent. This was dealt with by a clause in the act 'for repression of felonious rapes and ravishments of women, and of felonious burglaries' (18 Eliz c 7). By this 'unlawful and carnal knowledge' of a woman child under ten was made a felony. Whether she agreed to the act or not was immaterial, the law decreed that at so tender an age she was unable to consent ⁴⁷

The law relating to abduction emphasised again that women were seen at least to some extent as the chattels of their menfolk. T.E. emphasised that where a woman was abducted, it was the wishes of her parents and guardians that had the greatest importance, not whether or not she herself consented. By a statute of Henry VI ('too meeke and gentle' like the monarch) the abductor was merely fined £300. ⁴⁸ This was replaced by the stronger act 'Agaynst taking awaye of women agaynst theire willes' of 1487. By this the abduction of women 'having sustaunces somme in goodes moveables, and some in landes and tenementes, and some beyng heires apparauntes

⁴⁶ *Lawes Resolutions* pp. 396-400

⁴⁷ *Lawes Resolutions* pp. 400-402

⁴⁸ 31 Hen. VI c. 9

unto their ancestors for the lucre of such substauces' became a felony. It is clear that the loss of control over the heiress's property is part of the concern here, although the disparagement of the women is also mentioned.⁴⁹

The abduction of heiresses might not seem a major problem, but the interpretation of the law was gradually changed so that it was not considered a felony if it was followed by marriage, unless the girl was a deflowered virgin. This led to concern that heiresses were being seduced by flattery, gifts and 'faire promises' made by 'thintreatie of persons of lewde demeanour' into making unwise marriages without the consent of their parents. It was therefore made unlawful for anyone to remove an unmarried girl under sixteen from her father's or guardian's custody without his consent. This was punishable by a Star Chamber fine or two years imprisonment. If the abductor deflowered the 'woman child' or married her secretly without her parents' consent, the punishment was increased to five years imprisonment. Again the property aspects of this law are made clear by the fact that a girl between 12 and 16 years old who consented to such a marriage was deprived of the right to enjoy the profits of her lands and property. Instead they went to the next of kin (who would be assumed to be her heir after her death). On her death the estate reverted to her own heir (who might by now be her own child) but would not in any case go to her husband. While this act set out to protect young and possibly vulnerable women from exploitation, it did not take into account their own wishes, and where parents chose to marry off their young daughters to suit their own advantage, this was privileged by the law.⁵⁰

Although *The Lawes Resolution* is a long and detailed work, it does not deal with all aspects of the law relating to women. It pays little attention to the criminal law, except to note that in criminal cases married women were considered separate persons from their husbands.⁵¹ Indeed if a wife committed a felony and her husband avoided her company as soon as he knew about it, he was not guilty of felony himself. She on the other hand could escape a charge of felony if she only joined him in his crime as the result of coercion, and in general if husband and wife were partners in

⁴⁹ *Lawes Resolutions* p. 383; 3 Hen. VII c. 2, *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 2, p. 512

⁵⁰ *Lawes Resolutions* pp. 384-386; 4 & 5 Phil. and Mar. c. 8, *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 4, pp. 329-330

⁵¹ *Lawes Resolutions* p. 206

crime it was considered to be his fault. She was not required to reveal her husband's crime if she knew about it but did not partake in it, since a wife was not expected to betray her husband. If however stolen goods were found '*sub clavibus uxoris*' she was culpable with her husband, presumably since putting his booty into her cupboard counted as sharing in the crime in a way that simply keeping quiet about it did not. In the sixteenth as in the twentieth century, women formed only a minority of the criminal population: only 18% of property offences in Cheshire in the 1590s were committed by women. Contrary to what might have been expected, Garthine Walker has shown that most women burglars worked alone or with other women, rather than with male partners.⁵² A woman criminal who committed felony had a chance of deferring punishment which was denied to men, she could claim 'the benefit of her wombe'. She must not plead her pregnancy as an excuse, however, she could only use this after pleading her case. If she was attested pregnant she might then have her punishment deferred. She could do this only once. A woman who delivered her child and then promptly became pregnant again while in gaol, hoping to save herself once more, should be executed regardless, and moreover, added T. E., the judge would fine the marshal or sheriff responsible for the prison, for 'looking no better to her'.⁵³

The law regulated women's lives in other respects also. Female beggars and vagabonds were given some protection from the worst severity of the laws as they applied to men. The acts of 1495 and 1503-4 made provision for 'dymynucion of punusshment' for pregnant women who would not have to spend the three days and nights in the stocks which was the punishment fixed for men in 1495⁵⁴. The vicious poor law of 1547 however made no exception for females. Beggar mothers could have their children of both sexes taken away from them and forced into virtually slavery, the only moderation for women being that females were freed from their slavery at 20 and men not until 24. The milder act of 1550 which replaced the unworkable 1547 act allowed beggar mothers to keep their children of either sex up to the age of five, and where girls were put to work they were only compelled to remain up to 15 years old. Even here the girl was freed from service if she married

⁵² Garthine Walker, 'Women, theft and the world of stolen goods' in Kermode and Walker, eds, *Women crime and the courts* pp. 82, 85

⁵³ *Laws Resolutions* 206-207;

⁵⁴ 11 Hen. VII c.2, *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 2. p. 569; 19 Hen. VII c. 12, *Statutes* vol.4, pp. 656-7

before the age of 15. The boy had to stay in service up to 18, and there was no proviso for his marriage.⁵⁵ When it came to the control of the servants in the household, the law at least on occasion recognised the authority of women as equal to that of men. The Subsidy Act of 1523 made both masters and mistresses responsible for seeing that the subsidies of their servants were paid.⁵⁶

Another area of life regulated by statute in the early Tudor period, with little success, was that of dress. Three separate acts were passed in Henry VIII's reign (1 Hen. VIII c. 14, 6 Henr. VIII c.1, and 24 Henr VIII c. 13), itself perhaps an indication of the hopelessness of the cause.⁵⁷ The act of 1510 began by listing types of cloth such as velvet, cloth of gold and furs, that could be worn only by restricted groups of people. After making the restrictions, it made exemption from the rules for ambassadors and heralds (who while not necessarily noble were representing the king and expected to look their best), for 'mynstrelle players in interludes' who were in theatrical costume, and for the king's servants in his livery and in attendance on him. The first group listed as exempt was much less specific, being simply 'eny woman'. It was perhaps acknowledged that to prevent women, of any class, wearing the best and most fashionable clothes that they could afford, was simply an impossible task. The two later sumptuary acts of the reign ignored women altogether, mentioning only men, but in such a way as not to make clear whether 'men' was a specific category of the population. A further act passed in 1554 aimed to restrict the use of silk in accessories such as 'Hatt Bonett Nightcappe Gyrdell Hose Shooes Scabberd or Spurre Leathers'. The penalties were extremely severe, with a fine of £10 for every day's wearing plus three months imprisonment for anyone wearing these garments who was not of the rank of a knight's child or above, a borough official such as a mayor, or a royal servant. In this case women were specifically included, with the wives of each group being exempted with their husbands. In addition there was a rather vague general exemption for women who were allowed to wear hats, girdles etc. as 'they . . . might use and weare lawfully before the making of this Acte.'⁵⁸

⁵⁵ 1 Ed. VI c. 3, *Statutes* vol. 4, 6; 3 & 4 Ed. VI c. 16, *Statutes* vol. 4, pp. 115-116; John Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England* (London 1986)

⁵⁶ 14 & 15 Hen. VIII c.16, *Statutes* vol. 3, p. 235

⁵⁷ *Statutes* vol 3, pp. 8-9, 121-2

⁵⁸ 1 & 2 Ph. and Mar. c. 2, *Statutes* vol. 4, p. 239; Wilfrid Hooper, 'The Tudor Sumptuary Laws', *English Historical Review* vol. 30 (1915) pp. 433-449

There were a few attempts to control women's involvement in commercial life by statute in this period, though in some cases these dealt with women almost incidentally. 'An Act concernyng Artificers and Labourers' of 1515 fixed wages for a variety of groups of workers including various servants in husbandry. Male 'common servants of husbandry' were to receive 16s 8d a year, with 4s for clothing, and their meat and drink. Women in the same category were paid only 10s a year though with the same allowances. Curiously women day labourers seem if anything to have been better paid than their male colleagues, getting fourpence halfpenny as compared with fourpence a day for the men, though both received the same twopence a day if they also had food supplied.⁵⁹

The act 'For Silkewomen' set out to prevent imports of certain kinds of silk textiles such as ribbons, laces and girdles, which were made particularly by the women silk weavers of London. Curiously despite the title of the act, there is no specific mention of women, but it is clear that its purpose was to protect the women in this trade.⁶⁰ Another act designed to protect honest traders was the Act against the deceitful making of woollen cloth, which punished those who did not return the true weight of cloth when carding or spinning it. The major interest of this act in the present context is that different penalties were specified for the two sexes, the pillory for men and the cucking stool for women. The cucking or ducking stool was a device, often chair-like, used to give an enforced ducking in water (sometimes mud or filth) to the unfortunate person pinioned to it. It was traditionally regarded as the punishment for scolds, but was also used for prostitutes and cheats, and those who as here 'sold underweight or adulterated goods'⁶¹

It will be seen that trade could be restricted in favour of women, or in favour of the customer, but it could of course also be restricted against women. The case of medical practitioners illustrates this. In the middle ages medicine, including surgery, was practised by both men and women. Women indeed were regarded as having 'great potential for healing'. Gentlewomen such as Grace Mildmay and Margaret

⁵⁹ 6 Hen. VIII c. 3, *Statutes* vol. 3, pp. 124-6

⁶⁰ 19 Hen. VII c.21, *Statutes* vol. 2, p. 664; see also Marian K. Dale, 'The London silkwomen of the fifteenth century' *Economic History Review* IV (1933) pp. 324-335 for a general account of the silkwomen and their work.

⁶¹ 3 Hen. VIII c. 6, *Statutes* vol. 3, p. 28; Martin Ingram, 'Scolding women cucked or washed' in Kermode and Walker, *Women, Crime and the Courts* pp.58-59

Hoby at the end of the sixteenth century continued this tradition, dispensing medicine and treatment to their neighbours and dependents. Less wealthy women might act as 'cunning women' known in their own districts for their medical skills. All these women however while not necessarily untrained were unqualified, since the universities which gave formal qualifications for physicians were closed to them. The early modern period saw an increase in restrictions on women practising medicine except in a strictly amateur way. An act concerning physicians and surgeons, of 1511-12, claimed that great learning and ripe experience were needed for the practice of physic and surgery, but that 'common Artificers as Smythes Wevers and Women boldely and custumably take upon them grete curis and thyngys of great difficultie'. To make matters worse they used sorcery and 'noyous' medicines in their work. To prevent this therefore the act required that anyone practising physic or surgery had to be examined as to their competence by the local bishop or his representative, and a group of doctors of physic or surgery (that is, those with degrees). It may be assumed that they would not be very likely to grant their approval to women practitioners. However, perhaps talented gentlewomen were among others 'as well men as women' who were 'sued troubled and vexed' by the licensed surgeons. Certainly the amateurs managed to get parliament on their side and a second act thirty years later claimed that

divers persons as well men as women whom God hathe endued with
the knowledge of the nature kinde and operacon of certayne herbes
rootes and waters

were now unable to use their abilities to treat disease, even though they took no money for their services. The act therefore allowed this group to 'minister medicines outwarde' to treat certain kinds of sores, swellings and 'apostemacions' or abscesses. Despite this concession however the earlier act showed what would be the general trend towards excluding women from any kind of professional practice of medicine, followed for example by complaints in Norwich in 1561 against 'sundry women practioners' by the physicians and barber-surgeons of that city.⁶²

⁶² 3 Hen. VIII c. 11, 34-35 Hen. VIII c. 8; Statutes vol 3, pp. 31-32, 906; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender Sex and Subordination* (London 1995), pp. 232-240; Merry Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge 1993) p.95

It is inevitable that the many changes in the law arising from the Reformation would have had some impact on women, though in some cases the new law simply reflected the existing legal situation, as for example when the Mortuaries Act stated that no mortuary fees were to be demanded from any 'woman being covert baron, nor chylde, nor for any person not kepyng house'. A rather similar attitude towards women, this time lumping them as a group with 'artificers, prentises, journeymen' etc. was shown by the well known act of 1543 restricting the reading of the Bible in English. The government had become alarmed by the popularity of open reading and discussion of the recently authorised English Bible, and in the current conservative climate restricted its public reading to those approved by the ordinary. The lower orders, including women, were forbidden from reading the Bible at all, while laymen of higher social status might read it only within their households. A specific mention was made of the concession to allow noble women and gentlewomen to read the Bible 'to themselves alone and not to others'.⁶³

Women who lived in a sexual relationship with priests, often quietly tolerated by their parishes, also found their situation affected. In the first flush of the Reformation some clergy thought that like their German counterparts they would be allowed to marry, but Henry VIII made clear his total opposition to this. By an act of 1540 priests' concubines were faced with severe punishment, starting with loss of their goods and chattels for a first offence, and rising to loss of goods and life imprisonment for a third offence. By 1549 the wheel turned full circle and all restrictions on clerical marriage were removed, though with a preamble to the act that suggested a certain reluctance to accept this, since not only was celibacy desirable but also clergy would be better able to administer the gospel if they were 'free and unburdened from the care and coste of fyndynge Wyef and Children'. Despite this statute some people were doubtful whether a priest's marriage was a proper one, and whether his wife had the same rights as other wives. A second act of 1551-2 emphasised that clerical marriage was a proper marriage, and the children of clergy were legitimate. Moreover the priestly husband had the same rights as other men to the 'tenancy by courtesie' of his wife's lands after her death, and the wife in turn had the right of dower of her husband's lands, though it was carefully noted that this

⁶³ 21 Hen. VIII c. 6; Hen. VIII c. 1, *Statutes* vol. 3, pp. 894-897

applied only to those lands that her husband was seised of in his own right, and not those lands he held as part of his benefice. All these rights were swept away of course by Queen Mary.⁶⁴

Common law and statute law were not the only laws applying to women. Manorial law gave women rights such as 'freebench' which gave a widow the right to stay in a part of her marital home, which did not exist in common law. The law of equity could be used to enforce a woman's right to her jointure, or to support a demand for 'pin-money'. Women were able to bring cases into Chancery and the other equity courts, manorial courts, and church courts including probate courts. In the probate courts indeed around three quarters of those bringing cases were women⁶⁵ It is worth noting though that as Anthony Fletcher says even though women might be given better recognition in courts such as probate courts than by the old-fashioned common law, 'Individual men ran the system with the dedicated intention of preserving [the] status quo'.⁶⁶

It is worth returning to T.E. and *The Lawes Resolution of Womens Rights*. From time to time the author shows that he intended his book at least in part for a female audience, addressing comments directly to them. In his conclusion he told his female readers that he had aimed to set out things 'behoovefull for them to know . . . plaine together and in some orderly connexion which heretofore were smothered or scattered in corners of an uncooth language, clean abstruded from their sex'.⁶⁷ In other words, despite women's handicap of not having a proper Latinate education, he wanted them to have access to knowledge of the law. He is not in fact consistent to his own standpoint, quoting sometimes at length in Latin, using phrases of law French without explanation, citing authorities such as Bracton again without explanation, and Prest suggests that the book could have given little practical benefit to anyone except lawyers or law students, all of course male.⁶⁸ Nonetheless T.E. is relatively sympathetic to women's situation. A telling example of this is shown by his comment about a husband's right to beat his wife. In a variation of the proverb about 'a

⁶⁴ 32 Hen. VIII c. 10, *Statutes* vol. 3, pp. 744-5; 2 & 3 Edw. VI c. 21, 5 & 6 Edw. VI. c. 12 *Statutes* vol. 4, pp. 67, 146-7

⁶⁵ See Erickson, *Women and Property*, for use of probate courts by women.

⁶⁶ Fletcher, *Gender Sex and Subordination*, p. 263

⁶⁷ *Lawes Resolutions*, p. 403

⁶⁸ Prest, 'Law and women's rights', pp.176-7

woman, a dog and a walnut tree' T. E. says that a man may beat an outlaw, a traitor, a pagan, his villein or his wife, because none of them may have an action in law. In an aside he adds 'God send Gentlewomen better sport, or better company'.⁶⁹

On the evidence of the common law and statute, it is difficult to say that women's legal position either improved or deteriorated substantially over the period of the early Tudors. There were some individual improvements, such as the protection for women whose husbands made leases of their lands without consulting them. There were some deteriorations, such as the restrictions on women who wished to function as medical practitioners. Individual women were able to use the system to their advantage (Bess of Hardwick is of course a notable example a little later in the century) while there were other women who were disadvantaged by the system, for example Mary Countess of Northumberland with her largely unsuccessful attempts to gain her jointure. But in an age when the only career open for the vast majority of women was marriage, and a married woman was legally classed in the same category as an infant or a lunatic, it is difficult not to feel sympathy for these women. T E might use the expression 'woman's rights', but legally at least the rights of women were still very limited.

⁶⁹ *Lawes Resolutions*, p. 128

Part Two How women used the law: the practice

Women's practical use of the court system reveals a different picture from that presented by the legal theory about women. In their use of the courts women do not appear as passively accepting their fate, or even as second class citizens (a point of which T. E. was in fact aware). As Tim Stretton has pointed out, 'there was a gulf between the chauvinism of eminent judges and legal commentators', and the working legal system.⁷⁰ Women used the courts to further or protect their own interests, to claim their rights, to harrass their enemies, just as men did. At times they litigated alone, at times with other women, or with men, usually but not necessarily husbands or sons. Occasionally women featured as members of a community, participating alongside men in a common cause. There is moreover little sense of feminist solidarity shown by these cases. Women pursued other women through the courts just as they pursued men. Men in turn sometimes took action against women, clearly not regarding them as delicate creatures in need of protection (or indeed as voracious temptresses) but seeing them for instance as overly expansionist landlords, in the same way as they would see men in the same position.

In a study such as this it is inevitable that examples can only be selective. For practical reasons (notably the detail of calendaring) the cases studied have all been taken from the equity courts. Detailed studies of the Court of Chancery and women have been made by Maria Cioni⁷¹ and of women's use of the Court of Requests by Tim Stretton,⁷² but some cases from these courts have been chosen to give an indication of these courts' work. In addition a number of cases from Star Chamber have been reviewed. The majority of cases were taken from the early years of the reign of Edward VI. This to some extent avoids overlap with Cioni and Stretton, and

⁷⁰ Tim Stretton, *Women and Litigation in the Elizabethan Court of Requests* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge University 1993)

⁷¹ Maria Lynn Cioni, *Women and Law in Elizabethan England with particular reference to the Court of Chancery* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge 1974). Maria Lynn Cioni, "The Elizabethan Chancery and Women's Rights" in D. J. Guth and J. W. Mckenna, eds. *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G.R. Elton from his American Friends*, (Cambridge 1982)

⁷² Tim Stretton, *Women and Litigation*. Tim Stretton, "Women, custom and equity in the Court of Requests", in J. Kermode and G. Walker, eds., *Women Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, (London 1994)

meets the time parameters of this thesis, while representing the mature form of the courts. It also avoids the possibility of some religious bias entering cases during the overtly persecuting reign of Mary. It has to be admitted that several cases reflect the Edwardian concern with matters relating to enclosure. In addition to studying these cases, some statistical work has been done on a rather wider range of cases from the calendars, to give some indication of the use of the courts by women in this period. The samples are too small to be statistically significant, but give some limited information about the percentages of women using the courts, or having the courts used against them.⁷³

We may begin by briefly considering these statistics. Chancery decree rolls for the period from 26 Henry VIII to 5 & 6 Philip and Mary, show that about one third of cases involved women, appearing both as plaintiffs and defendants, either on their own or together with men. This compares with Amy Erickson's suggestion that about a quarter of cases in the Elizabethan Chancery involved women.⁷⁴ Tim Stretton suggests that the number of women using Requests under Elizabeth was similar, 32% of his sample of 2000 cases.⁷⁵ In the Requests appearance lists for 6 Edward VI counted for this thesis, the annual average is much lower at 17%. The figures of women using Star Chamber are based on proceedings from the reign of Edward VI, and average at 22%. This is considerably higher than the estimate of 8 or 9% that Stretton gives based on the early seventeenth century. It must be remembered that the overall figures here refer to all women participants in court cases, plaintiffs and defendants, and do not indicate whether women appeared on their own or with a male co-plaintiff or defendant (most often though not always a husband). Stretton suggests that for the Elizabethan Court of Requests the largest group of women were those appearing with their husbands, and in many (though not all) such cases the wife's involvement might be purely nominal.⁷⁶ This applies also to the cases considered here

In most groups of cases, women were more likely to be plaintiffs in their own right than they were defendants. In Star Chamber, for example, out of 734 cases counted from the calendar, of which 165 involved women, only 3 had women on their

⁷³ See Appendix 1, below pp. 293-294

⁷⁴ cited by Stretton, *Women and Litigation*, p. 46.

⁷⁵ Stretton, *op. cit.*, p. 47

⁷⁶ Stretton, *op. cit.*, p. 153

own as defendants. It could be argued that women were less likely to use violence, and thus less likely to be called to appear before Star Chamber. However in Chancery, which was sympathetic to women, twice as many cases featured women plaintiffs pleading on their own, as women defendants on their own. Many of these cases of women plaintiffs involved widows with no-one else to protect their rights, and no hope of redress but to go to court alone. Where compensation was sought, a woman defendant was less likely to be able to satisfy a plaintiff than a man or a married couple, and perhaps injured parties were more likely to pursue a case through the courts where they had more likelihood of practical satisfaction. As already stated the samples are very small, too small to allow many firm conclusions to be made, but it can confidently be said that in a notoriously litigious age, women were quite prepared to litigate along with men. Certainly they were not stopped by fears of damage to their modesty.

In what ways, then, did women use the courts? Primarily, it must be said, to protect their property or their rights to property. The different courts functioned in different ways, and the particular concerns of the courts are reflected in the cases, but all the equity courts were concerned with property rights. Chancery, as Maria Cioni has shown, was sympathetic to women whether married or single (single women going to law were normally widows).⁷⁷ Chancery was also particularly interested in uses and trusts, by which a man could provide special protection for a wife or a widow as well as for daughters and other heirs.⁷⁸ Another special interest of Chancery was the documentation which supported a claim to property, often known as the 'evidences', and the pursuit of evidences occurs frequently here. Chancery would assist a woman to recover her evidences when they were held against her interests by the reversionary heir or some other person. This was especially important when her jointure was threatened, since the common law would not allow her to bring a case without the evidences.⁷⁹

Star Chamber had its own concerns. The theory of Star Chamber was that the court dealt with matters of public order, and to get cases heard by the court plaintiffs

⁷⁷ Cioni, *The Elizabethan Chancery and Women's Rights*, pp.160-162

⁷⁸ For uses, see e.g. the cases of Alice Arden, Johane Alcocke and Chrystan Ambrose.

⁷⁹ Cioni, *Women and Law in Elizabethan England*, p. 21. For evidences, see e.g. the cases of Elizabeth Alyngton, Juliana Alyn, Alice Kett, and Alice Androwe.

would frequently include reference to riot. All the cases studied here do this, sometimes with graphic supporting detail about the nature of the 'weapons offensive and defensive' that were carried by the participants. 'Riot' covered many possibilities, and really seems to have meant that some of the participants were armed, which was most people's normal state when knives were regularly carried, and even everyday farm implements could be counted as weapons. In fact many of the Star Chamber cases related to eviction, sometimes connected with enclosure. Others were unusually aggressive family quarrels.

The defining characteristic of the Court of Requests was supposed to be that it dealt with poor men's causes. However like the other equity courts it was fast and efficient, and not surprisingly attracted others beside the poor. This was even institutionalised by its use for cases involving the royal household.⁸⁰ None of the cases looked at here were brought by royal servants, but several were brought by those who were not obviously poor. One case did state that the woman concerned felt she was being ignored by the manor court because of her poverty, and had therefore brought her case to Requests. However even this claim may be a little spurious, since the case was brought into Requests by the manor steward, hardly suggesting that Elyn Pendry was being ignored by the manor.⁸¹

Within the general description of property cases, certain sub-divisions can be made. The most important are the property rights of widows, and of daughters as co-heiresses. There are also some cases where women claimed to be the heirs of other relations such as cousins. The cases of widow's rights may be considered first. The basic rights of widows to dower or jointure have been described above,⁸² and it may briefly be recapitulated here that widows had a common law right of dower to one third of their husband's property. This dower right was alterable if a jointure was established, normally giving the widow a better deal. There were also various local rights associated with the rules of the manor (the widow of a copyholder usually had a right to accommodation in her old home) and of certain boroughs. Widows used the courts where they felt that they were not receiving the rights to which they were due.

⁸⁰ Stretton, *Women and Litigation*, pp.86-87

⁸¹ P.R.O. REQ 1/9/70. All mss. sources cited in this section are from the Public Record Office, so they will henceforth be cited by their P.R.O. reference number and without the prefix 'P.R.O.'

⁸² See above pp. 74-76

Chancery supported widows' rights and was prepared to support the jointress against the heir if the court felt this was equitable. Other equity courts such as Requests might take a similar view. As Cioni put it the jointress and the heir were 'inherent competitors' especially when the widow was the second wife, and not the mother of the heir.⁸³ This point seems to be supported by the two cases considered below.

Elizabeth, the widow of Simon Webbe, a London gentleman, had been deprived of her rights to her dower of one third of her husband's goods by Robert Webbe, his executor. Robert's precise relationship to Elizabeth is not made clear, but it may be surmised that Robert was Simon's son and heir, and Elizabeth was Simon Webbe's second wife. Robert had neither paid Elizabeth her dower nor handed over property which she claimed was due to her as a legacy from her husband, including a couple of small pieces of jewelry, two side saddles and some bedding. Chancery oversaw an agreement between them by which specified lands were given to Elizabeth, while she relinquished her general dower rights. The court also noted that Elizabeth was to have 'counterpaynes' or copies of the relevant leases for the lands. This was important, as without these 'evidences' Elizabeth would not be able to prove her title⁸⁴

A rather similar case was that of Johane Gully, heard before the Court of Requests. In Johane's case also the lands she had expected to receive at her husband's death were kept from her. Nicholas Gully had left his wife a life interest in the property, according to the custom of the manor of Camden. This had been kept from her by the heir, another Nicholas. Once again there is no evidence of his relationship with the testator. Again the court found in the widow's favour.⁸⁵

It is possible that both Elizabeth and Johane may have been second wives and thus stepmothers of the heir, but Jane Coryton and Isabell Rollesley were both the natural mothers of heirs, in dispute with their sons. Jane's late husband Peter Coryton had been a substantial landowner in Cornwall, with over two thousand acres of land, and also rents, chattels etc worth £1000. According to Jane, Peter made a will in writing, and left the bulk of his property to Jane, provided she remained unmarried, and afterwards to his grandson Peter. Jane and Peter's son Richard challenged this,

⁸³ Cioni, *Women and Law* pp. 203-208

⁸⁴ C 78/1/38

⁸⁵ REQ 1/9/16

denying that his father had made such a will, though both sides admitted that relations between mother and son were poor. According to Richard, the case had been taken to arbitration, and an agreement made between the parties, largely in Richard's favour, though the arbitrators did make provision for Jane and her daughters. Jane was given notice to quit, and on the due date Richard and his men arrived to take over the property. According to Jane Coryton's account, the men were heavily armed, and broke into the manor lands and house. They removed £200 worth of Jane's chattels, and shut Jane up in her own chamber for two days, without 'meate, drynke or fyre'. Fortunately Jane was succoured by her own daughters who were able to get food through the windows 'and other secrete places of the said house'. Richard not surprisingly denied any knowledge of this false imprisonment of his mother, and claimed that his father had died intestate, which would have benefited him.⁸⁶ Whatever the final outcome of the case, the ultimate relationship between mother and son is hardly likely to have improved.

The Rolesleys were another quarellsome family. Richard Rollesley had lent his father Walter various sums of money, but at his death Walter had not repaid his son, though he had sufficient goods and money to do so. Perhaps this money lending had soured the relationship, but when Walter died his will made his wife Isabell and his younger son Anthony his executors, excluding Richard. The executors claimed the land and the chattels, and Isabell said that they were hers on the basis of survivorship. This case came before Requests, and the court gave its support to Richard (who brought the case) rather than to the widow. Isabell was allowed to remain in occupation of the properties, but the actual ownership was passed to Richard. Isabell moreover must keep the properties well maintained, and must make no waste. In addition she must pay her son £10, whether as rent or as part of the repayment of the loan is not clear. Richard in his turn had to make a bond of £100 to his mother. It is clear that the courts would consider the interests of widows, but did not consider it their duty to protect widows in all cases.⁸⁷

Not all cases of infringements of widows' rights involved sons and stepsons, of course. Other family members might dispute the widow's claims. When John Claypole died his widow Mary took over his copyholding of two cottages and fifteen

⁸⁶ STAC 3/1/48

⁸⁷ REQ 1/9/24-25

acres of customary land. Mary though neglected to make the necessary repairs or to pay the rent charges, and passed the tenancy on to one John Magnus. Meanwhile John Claypole's cousin Elyn Pendry, who claimed that she should be John's heir, tried to get her case heard in the manor court. As mentioned above, she claimed that the manor court would not give her a hearing because of her poverty, so she had the case taken to the court of requests. The manor steward took up Elyn's case (perhaps because of those unpaid rents and services) and the court found in Elyn's favour.⁸⁸

Women, as has been noted above, were frequently appointed to be executrix of their late husband's estate, either on their own or in partnership. These rights as executrix were not affected by the woman's subsequent remarriage, and indeed were specifically protected. Chancery for example believed that a woman's position as an executor 'transcended the legal limitations of a married woman', and a married woman could make a will in her own right to deal with commitments she had as an executrix.⁸⁹ If in this situation she needed to take a case to court, it was customary for her to do this together with her husband. Thus Elizabeth Chapman, formerly Williams, went with her second husband to the Court of Requests to claim restitution for income due from properties belonging to her first husband. One Peter Dunne had acquired the indentures of the lease of a meadow which Elizabeth's first husband David Williams had held from the Mayor and Corporation of Reading. The widowed Elizabeth had made an agreement with Peter Dunne that he would allow her grazing for two cows in the meadow, and would allow her to occupy a house he owned for a rent of 46s 8d a year. In addition, since David Williams had erected a new barn on the meadow shortly before his death, Peter would either allow Elizabeth to demolish the barn (to sell or reuse the timbers) or he would pay her for it. However once Peter Dunne had his hands on the meadow, he reneged on the agreement. He neither provided the grass for two cows, nor allowed her to demolish the barn, and in addition demanded an increased rent of 5 marks (66s 8d) for the cottage. All this happened within the first six months after the agreement was made, but Elizabeth did not take Peter Dunne to court until seven years after her husband died. In this case it would seem either that Elizabeth's new husband Anthony Chapman encouraged her to take the case to court when she had been unwilling to expose herself to judgement

⁸⁸ REQ 1/9/70

⁸⁹ see above pp. 76-77 . Cioni, *Women and Law*, p.262

while she was on her own, perhaps fearing what action Peter Dunne might take, or that she had not been able to afford the expense of the case on her own. It may be noted that as well as finding in Elizabeth's favour, the court ordered Peter Dunne to pay 20s towards her costs.⁹⁰

One of the most unfortunate cases involving a widow was that of the twice widowed Chrystyan Grove. Chrystyan's first husband had left her a rich widow, with personal possessions worth a thousand pounds. Regrettably she did not chose to enjoy the freedom her status as a rich widow would have given her, but was instead married again, to Richard Grove. In September 1537, before their marriage, Grove had taken a lease on the manor of Cockyngton, belonging to the convent of the Holy Cross at Southampton. The lease involved a complex arrangement of rents, payable partly in cash and partly in kind. However Richard Grove was not lucky as a farmer, and much of his livestock died, leaving him in arrears with his rents. It is perhaps hardly surprising that he was attracted to Chrystyan, the rich widow. Once they were married, Grove used Chrystyan's money to restock his farm and pay his debts, as he was entitled to do under the rules of coverture. Alas, Richard Grove died, and made only a nuncupative will, though he had the decency to acknowledge that he owed much to Chrystyan's wealth. The nuncupative will made Chrystyan executor, but it seems that the will was not properly completed in some way. It was unfortunate for Chrystyan that the Dissolution of the Monasteries had left the manor belonging not to a convent, but to Thomas West, Lord Lawarr. Because the rents were not properly paid up to date, and because they had not been correctly assigned to Chrystyan, Lord Lawarr took over the property. He was not unreasonable however and allowed Chrystyan to remain on the payment of £40. Her troubles were not yet over. One Thomas Wroughton, a well known local man, coveted the property, and banded together with a kinsman of Grove's, John Grove, to claim that the nuncupative will was not valid. John Grove, having been given letters of adminstration, sold all the livestock and chattels to Wroughton 'for a very litle sum of money', and they then

⁹⁰ REQ 1/9/51-52 This accords with Stretton's view that it was quite common for women to bring a case after they had married for the second time, since they were then likely to have more resources and a greater knowledge of their rights. Stretton, *Women and Litigation* p.157. However Stretton also suggests (apparently inconsistently) that widowhood with its concomitant resumption of a woman's legal status, was also often a spur to ligation. Stretton, *op. cit.* p. 133

forcibly evicted Chrystyan and her servants. The unfortunate Chrystyan was left 'a very pore woman and hathe few frends or Acquaintances in the said countie'. Having entered her marriage to Grove a rich woman, she was left now with nothing, illustrating some of the worst aspects of the laws regarding women and their property.⁹¹

Not all the cases involving widows' rights concerned land or a person's chattels. Where a merchant died with transactions unresolved, it might fall to his wife to try to sort matters out. Elizabeth Wodlis, widow and executrix of William Wodlis a London mercer, was left with a complex mercantile problem after her husband's death. A ship load of malvesyes (malmsey wine) and silk from Messina, belonging to one Edward Elsey, was sold by Elsey's mother (his executor) to Sir Humphrey Browne, a justice of the common pleas. Browne in his turn sold the load to William Wodlis. For reasons that were not made clear, the transaction was never completed, and negotiations dragged on for twelve years, until William died. Elizabeth claiming to be 'a poore widowe' and no doubt wanting to raise any money she could, took the case to Requests. The court investigated, finding a complex set of dealings. Some wine was still held by Browne, while four of the butts of malmsey had been handed over by Browne to one Anthony Elliott. The Court of Requests submitted the matter to arbitrators who ordered that Elizabeth Wodlis should be compensated with 54 ducats for the butts of malmsey delivered to Elliott, and that Browne should pay £20 for the remaining malmsey which he still held. While the court emphasised that this settlement removed any remaining obligations between Browne and the Wodlises, it is clear that even when dealing with an important man, the equity courts were prepared to uphold the rights of a widow if they considered them justified. From Elizabeth's point of view it was no doubt better to receive cash in hand rather than to be left with quantities of wine to sell.⁹²

In addition to their property rights as widows, women sometimes had rights as daughters. By common law when a man had only daughters they were equal co-heiresses, in other words primogeniture did not apply. Sisters however could not always agree. Elizabeth Symmes and Katherine Stayre were daughters of one John Gostling of Aldermaston. Gostling had died in possession of a message of four

⁹¹ STAC 3/5/61

⁹² REQ 1/9/40-43

score acres of mixed land, pasture, wood and meadow at Aldermaston. Clearly Katherine, who also lived at Aldermaston, and her husband had claimed this land quickly after the father's death. Elizabeth and her husband maintained that the land was freehold and that she was therefore entitled to a half share of it. The court in this instance agreed with Elizabeth Symmes. The relatively small amounts of land involved are a reminder of the wide definition of the word 'heiress' at this time.⁹³

Women who were born with male siblings might become heiresses if their brothers died. Eleanor Culleyn was one of seven children, two sons and five daughters, of John Hall of Tewkesbury. According to the laws of the manor of Tewkesbury, all lands and tenements in the town could be demised by will, with the approval of the manor. John Hall therefore left a life interest in his house to his wife Agnes, followed by his sons William and Henry in turn, and then to his five daughters. A succession of deaths left only two daughters, Katherine and Eleanor. Katherine did not want a half share of a house, and made over her share to Eleanor, who duly enjoyed the freehold of the property, letting it to Henry Tanner. This arrangement continued peacefully for some time, until Henry Hall's son John Hall turned up with his friend Henry Mechyn and others, and demanded access to the house. They turned the unfortunate Henry Tanner out into the street, together with his wife, children and all their possessions. John Hall and Henry Mechyn justified their actions on the grounds that as a male descendant of the original owner he had a better right than Eleanor, a woman. He did not express himself in quite so 'chauvinistic' a way, but claimed that his grandfather had not made a will, and the property therefore had never lawfully descended to Eleanor and Katherine. It is clear though that Hall and Mechyn believed that the second generation in the male line was to be preferred to the first generation in the female line. Eleanor equally clearly did not accept this reasoning, since she took the case before Star Chamber.⁹⁴

The proper payment of daughters' legacies could be another problem. William Browne, alderman of the city of London, left a considerable fortune of nearly fifteen hundred pounds. Half of this was to go to his eldest son and executor, another William, while the other half, was to be divided equally between his children, of whom John and Anne remained. It was perhaps good fortune for John Browne that

⁹³ REQ 1/9/69

⁹⁴ STAC 3/2/80

his sister was married to Sir William Petre, one of the king's secretaries. Certainly the commissioners appointed by Chancery to consider the case were men of stature, being the Master of the Rolls, the Chancellor of the Augmentations and the King's Cofferer. They found that William Browne who had appeared before Chancery several times, could give no acceptable reason for his refusal to meet his siblings' demands, and the court duly gave its judgement in favour of Anne Petre and John Browne, who were each to receive a quarter of their father's estate.⁹⁵

The problem of evidences for widows has already been briefly discussed. Evidences could on occasion also be a problem for daughters, as Juliana Alyn's case illustrates. The difference in this case is that Juliana was a mere child. Juliana's father, Robert Alyn, took over a debt of one Robert Tregonnowe, for the sum of £22 5s 4d. The understanding was that if Tregonnowe defaulted, then Robert Alyn and his heirs would acquire Tregonnowe's house and land. The writings to certify the agreement were held for safe keeping by a third party, John Udy. Robert Alyn duly paid the debt, and since Tregonnowe indeed did not pay up, Alyn acquired the land, and died with it in his possession. Since Juliana was Alyn's sole heir, at his death she inherited. The problem was that John Udy still kept the writings, as well as others belonging to Alyn, so that Juliana did not know what her father's holdings were. To make the situation worse, Udy and another Robert Allyn (sic; it is not made clear if he was a relation) had entered into the lands, and Juliana risked losing her inheritance. The problem of 'writings' or 'evidences' confirming title to land was a recurrent one, faced by Lady Lisle among others. Without the vital piece of parchment it could be impossible to prove one's case. John Udy for his part denied that he had been given the writings for safe keeping at all, claiming instead that Robert Alyn was his tenant, and had left the papers in a chest of Udy's which seems to have been part of the furnishings of the cottage. After Alyn's death the chest had been opened and the copy of Alyn's agreement with Tregonnowe found inside. According to Udy, the papers had been removed by Juliana's uncle, Perce James, for Juliana's benefit. Udy denied that he had misused the documents in any way, and indeed denied any involvement in the case at all. Significantly Udy also said that since Juliana was a child of only ten or eleven years, the case should not have been brought by her at all, but by her guardian.

⁹⁵ C 78/1/40

A similar point was made by Robert Tregonnowe when he in his turn gave evidence. He revealed a further complication, which was that his agreement with Alyn involved an arrangement that his son Richard Tregonnowe should marry Juliana. Although the case was brought in Juliana's name it would seem unlikely that a child would have initiated this herself, and the unseen hand of an adult, perhaps Perce James, may be assumed to lurk in the background.⁹⁶

Women complained when the vital evidences that guaranteed their property rights were kept from them. Women though were also capable of retaining the evidences if it suited them. One who did so was Anne Kett, widow of the rebel Robert Kett. After Kett's attainder and execution his lands were given to Thomas Audley, one of the gentlemen of the Privy Chamber. Anne Kett however did not hand over the evidences, but kept them, and using the evidences to reinforce her case, entered into Kett's disputed lands. The Chancery proceedings do not record the end of the case, which had been brought by Audley, but it seems unlikely that Anne Kett would have been allowed to retain the lands, not so much because she was a woman, as because she was the widow of an attainted rebel, in conflict with a leading courtier⁹⁷

Anne Kett could be seen in some ways as a victim, but she was clearly also a woman of character. One of the points made clear by these cases is that women in early Tudor England could be strong minded and even aggressive in pursuing their rights, or indeed their ambitions. Elizabeth Yerborough from Lincolnshire, claimed a parcel of land called the Bynges in the parish of Kelsterne as part of her jointure. According to Elizabeth and her supporters the manor had the right to the sole use of the Bynges at certain times of year, but according to some of the villagers the land was and always had been common pasture. Elizabeth's attempts to place her sheep there led to a fight between Elizabeth's servants and Robert Harrison, a husbandman who was keeping cattle on the Bynges. Harrison was injured in the fight. In the fracas Elizabeth's sheep were driven off to a field five miles away, and Elizabeth claimed that most of them cast their lambs. This was of course denied by those on the other side of the argument. The precise details of this affair, which can be seen as a minor

⁹⁶ C 1/1189/31

⁹⁷ C 1/1189/68

enclosure riot, are difficult to distinguish, but Elizabeth's role as a powerful and determined woman is clear.⁹⁸

A quite exceptional case revealing a woman of character is that of Alice Avery. Alice had worked as a victualler in Boulogne during the English occupation there, and had made the acquaintance of Thomas Kemys, a soldier. On returning to London the pair had set up house together, running a victualling house which also seems to have taken lodgers. Thomas however had committed a felony and been duly executed. The sheriff of Middlesex, John Mershe, had arrested Alice and briefly imprisoned her, also confiscating the goods and chattels from their house. Alice was released when her lack of involvement in Kemys' crime was established, and began her fight to get the goods back. Alice said that the goods were not, as Mershe claimed, Kemys' property, but hers.

As a married woman, of course, Alice would have had no property of her own, even if she had brought it to the marriage. She claimed though that the property was hers, on the grounds that she and Kemys were not actually man and wife. Alice maintained that she and Thomas had been living in sin, because Thomas had a wife in Wales. There had been some gossip about this before. Some of Alice's customers confirmed this, saying they believed the pair were not married and that Thomas had a wife in Wales. The gossip had led to Thomas and Alice being summoned before a jury to explain their conduct and answer the accusation that they kept 'evyll rewle'. Thomas had sworn before the jurymen that he and Alice were indeed husband and wife and had been married at St Margaret's Westminster. Thomas was said to have threatened to beat up the local constable when he called to admonish them for their behaviour. Curiously though one witness remembered Thomas telling the jury that he had indeed had a wife in Wales, 'an old froward woman'. Apparently Thomas had admitted that he could not live quietly with her, and so had sued for a divorce, and then married Alice. Technically of course this was not possible. 'Divorce' granted legal separation, but did not give either party the right to remarry. None of the witnesses however suggested that the marriage at St Margaret's was in fact bigamous. Alice for her part maintained that she had not been married to Thomas at all, and brought her case to the Star Chamber to sue for the return of her property by the

⁹⁸ STAC 3/1/65; STAC 3/5/65

sheriff. She appended a schedule of her property to her deposition, which reveals a reasonably prosperous household. Her belongings included a 'standing bed', a joint table, three carpets to cover tables and a cupboard, kitchen equipment, half a dozen silver spoons, and a livery coat that had probably belonged to Thomas. John Mershe the sheriff also supplied a list of the property taken from Alice's house, and there are some discrepancies. Interestingly Mershe includes more beds than Alice does, reinforcing the suggestion given by some of the witnesses that Alice's house may have served partly as a lodging house, but his list does not include the silver spoons. Either the sheriff's men were light fingered, or Alice was hoping for a bit of extra compensation. Alice's property mattered to her; to retain it she was prepared to face public recognition of her position as a woman living in sin.⁹⁹

The Kemys household was apparently unconventional, but there is no suggestion that Alice and Thomas did not have a satisfactory relationship. Other families were overtly conventional and respectable, but in fact were what might in twentieth century terms be called highly dysfunctional. Two such families are chosen for consideration because of the involvement of women litigants on both sides in each case. Firstly, Jane Poole and her daughter Anne Knevett. Jane was an elderly gentlewoman who lived in a large house at Bramley near Shalford in Surrey. The widowed Jane had remarried William Barantyne, and it is possible this remarriage contributed to poor relations between mother and daughter. Jane complained that Anne neglected her, and Anne claimed that her mother said she was afraid of her husband. It appears that in response to a message from Jane Poole that she was 'very evill kepte' and surrounded by servants who kept 'very Dishonest Rule', Anne Knevett decided to visit her mother. Anne was accompanied by her son-in-law Francis Kelway and her friend Lady Rogers, as well as servants, suggesting she felt the need for witnesses. On arrival they found the outer door locked, and Anne Knevett told one of her servants to put his shoulder to it. From this point on the stories diverge. Anne claimed that she went into the house, saw her mother, knelt and asked for her blessing. Dame Jane on the other hand said that far from forcing one door and then coming in peacefully, Anne and her party broke down seven doors in succession, chasing the terrified woman and her servants from room to room, in fear of their

⁹⁹ STAC 3/3/59; see Appendix 4 (below pp. 301-304) for Alice's property

lives. One of the causes of dispute was Jane's waiting woman Philippa Turke. According to Anne, she asked her mother to send for Philippa to rebuke her for the 'many obprobriouse words' that Philippa had used about her. Francis Kelway went in search of Philippa, found her hiding in 'a lytell house by the hall', and made her go with him to the other women. Here Anne Knevett slapped Philippa (according to Anne and Kelway) or beat her severely while two servants held her down (according to Jane Poole). Following this incident Jane Poole claimed that she and her servants were 'in grete danger and perill of ther lyffes'. While it might be suggested that Anne was right, and her elderly and perhaps mildly senile mother was being taken advantage of by her second husband and her servants, it may be noted that the Star Chamber case was brought in the name of Jane Poole herself and not that of William Barantyne.¹⁰⁰

The second of these cases, from lower down the social scale, concerns a Devon mother-in-law and daughter-in-law both confusingly called Joan Denys. As so often with Star Chamber cases where several contradictory depositions survive, it is difficult to assess the truth of the story. What appears to have happened is that Joan Denys senior, and William her husband, housed their son Andrew, his wife Joan and their children, and may have contributed financially to the upbringing of the children. They lived in a house with a hundred acres of farmland at Ilfracombe, which William and Joan leased from Lawrence Cutliff. At considerable expense William obtained the reversion of this property from Cutliff for Andrew. Some witnesses said that William conveyed the land to Joan by the symbolic cutting of a turf, but Joan senior denied that the land was given to Joan junior. As often seems to have happened, the indenture of the lease was given to a third party, John Colomore, for safe keeping, and when John died it passed into the hands of his son Robert.

Although Andrew and Joan knew that the land would come to them in due course, they were reluctant to wait for their inheritance, and their covetousness was demonstrated by their obtaining the indenture from Robert Colomore. After Andrew died, Joan married John Stephyn, but clearly she did not want to give up the chance of acquiring the land. It appears that Joan Stephyn went with a group of others to William's house, where William, aged about eighty, lay sick in bed. William, naked in

¹⁰⁰ STAC 3/1/82

his bed, was carried out into the street and left there. Fortunately his daughter Annys Hartnell came by after an hour, probably in response to an appeal by a neighbour, and covered him up. William was then conveyed to an outhouse, or as some depositions say 'a voyd house'. Here William and Joan remained from September to January, with no place to make a fire 'for their comfort in that cold tyme of wynter', and depended on their son-in-law Roger Hartnell, and other neighbours, for their sustenance. They could not get back into the main house because the locks had been changed.

Eventually, for reasons that were not explained, Joan and John Stephyn took William back into the house, against his will, but kept his wife Joan away from him (though they denied this). After a few days William died, apparently 'for lake of good kepyng'. The grieving widow, determined to have control of the funeral, collected her friends and relations and forced the hall door of the house before carrying William's corpse from the kitchen where it lay, out through the hall and to its burial. Joan the daughter-in-law, accusing her mother-in-law and others of riot, claimed that she and her children were turned out of the house. This case, while confusing, reveals women acting with determination in defence of what they perceived as their interests. Both Joans were certainly strong minded women, though their behaviour might not seem to fit the stereotype figure of woman as quiet, gentle and submissive.¹⁰¹

The cases considered so far show women acting alone or with their husbands. One case of those examined however shows two women taking legal action together with a group of men, and illustrates the way that on some occasions women, at least if they were widows, could function as members of the community on equal terms with men. The customary tenants of the settlements of Northey, Mexton and Pamington near Tewkesbury were in dispute with the new lord of the manor, Sir John Rybalt, and his steward William Reede. The tenants, all copyholders, claimed that they had occupied their holdings 'time out of memory of man' for a certain yearly rent, and had the right to use certain common pastures in Northey. William Reede tried to turn the copyholders off the pasture claiming that they did not have leave to use it, offering them instead a lease for term of years. The Court of Requests in this case backed the customary tenants and insisted that the modernising Reede should not get his way. The interest of this case is that the list of seventeen named tenants includes

¹⁰¹ STAC 3/5/18

two women, Elyn Rayner and Johane Carpenter, as well as unnamed 'other customary tenants and inhabitants'. Elyn and Johane were evidently well enough regarded not to be relegated to the anonymous 'other tenants', and engaged themselves in the suit on equal terms with their male neighbours.¹⁰²

In this case women joined with their neighbours against grasping landlords, but of course women on occasion could themselves be the landlords. Elizabeth Halsey angered her neighbours by enclosing fields in Dovebridge that had traditionally been common grazing, and chasing off their cattle with 'a great dog'.¹⁰³ Women might also work in concert with their husbands, and this is reflected in the occasional court case. Sir Thomas and Dame Margaret Essex had the reversionary rights to the manor of Stalpyttes at Shrivenham in Berkshire. The demesne lands of Stalpyttes were held by Joan Hynton, widow, and her son Thomas. One part of the manor lands was an enclosed field called Stalpyttes close, which was surrounded by an old stone wall.

According to some witnesses the stone wall was decayed and in serious need of repair. Sir Thomas Essex was building himself a new house only half a mile away from the close, and clearly saw the old stone wall as an opportunity. Dame Margaret Essex negotiated with Joan Hynton as to whether she would let Sir Thomas have the stone, if he had a hedge put up around the close, no doubt emphasising the greater stock resistance of a new hedge compared with an old wall. Joan apparently initially agreed, although she later changed her mind. Meanwhile Essex sent his men to begin to demolish the wall. Five or six hundred loads of stone were removed. Joan was now regretting her decision, especially when some sixty men were employed to pull down the wall. Joan claimed that they were armed and riotous. When Sir Thomas sent his men to rebuild the mound (possibly this was a dyke around the field on which the hedge would be placed), and to lay the hedge, Joan Hynton sent them packing. As a result the field was left with inadequate protection, and was largely useless. Joan took Sir Thomas to Star Chamber, demanding action against him on the grounds of forcible entry. Apart from the interest in this case for the actions of Joan Hynton as a widow in defence of her own interests, the case is also notable for what it reveals about the role of Dame Margaret Essex, a married woman who clearly played a

¹⁰² REQ 1/9/55-58

¹⁰³ STAC 3/1/20

significant part in the running of her husband's estate. None of the references to Dame Margaret show any criticism of her role.¹⁰⁴

The cases discussed here have been chosen to illustrate certain specific points, but they give a fair picture of the evidence obtained from the various cases studied. It is true that married women brought cases to the equity courts only in collaboration with their husbands, and some might consider that it is an indication of woman's inferior status that for example Anne Petre was required to make her claim for a fair share of her father's estate by linking her name with her husband's. At least the money was recognised by the court as being Anne's inheritance, not as already being William Petre's money. It is also true that a high proportion of the cases brought by women were brought by widows. This is only to be expected in a society where men predominated as landowners and where coverture restricted women's rights of ownership, but where widows functioned in most ways as 'honorary men'. It also reflects the reality that married women could concentrate on the domestic and familial aspects of their lives, but that widows must additionally assume the male administrative and 'public' roles. It must be remembered though that some married women such as Dame Margaret Essex did play these public roles, and were not hindered by the law

More positively, there is ample evidence that the equity courts treated women as people, not as inferior or different. This is shown both in cases brought by women and in cases brought against them. There is very little evidence that either the courts or the witnesses responded to women in a special or discriminatory way. Rather the courts treated women as was appropriate for the evidence they gave.

Chapter Four

Honor Viscountess Lisle: The Lady Deputy

On the 19th May 1540, Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle, the King's Deputy in Calais, while on a visit to London, was suddenly imprisoned in the Tower, accused of treason. After two years he was pardoned, but died before he could be released. As part of the investigations, all Lord Lisle's papers, official and private, were confiscated. Because they had been based in Calais for seven years, away from the mainstream of events, from many of their family and friends, even from the tradesmen they used, both Arthur Lisle and his wife Honor had carried on a great deal of correspondence. An almost daily correspondent was their man of business in London, John Husee, who undertook most of their commissions, but also carried out services as diverse as presenting the New Year gifts to the King, and keeping a watch over the children left behind. Because of the confiscation of the Lisle correspondence in 1540, it was preserved in the government archives, and eventually entered the collection of the Public Record Office. The letters were edited by Muriel St Clare Byrne, and published in 1981.¹ The great quantity of material allows one to recreate many of the concerns of the Lisles' daily lives, and in particular allows the creation of a picture of many aspects of the life of Honor Lisle.²

Honor Lisle was born Honor Grenville, daughter of Sir Thomas Grenville of Stowe in Cornwall, and his wife Isabella Gilbert in approximately 1493-95. Grenville was a gentleman, an esquire of the body to Henry VII, Sheriff of Cornwall in 1485, and a justice of the peace from 1510 to 1514. His daughter Honor was married in 1515 to Sir John Basset of Umberleigh in Devon by whom she had seven children; Philippa, born c. 1516, John, born 1518, Katherine, born 1517 or 1519/20, Anne, born c 1521, Mary and George, born between 1522 and 1525, and finally James born 1527.³ Basset was a widower some thirty years older than Honor, with four daughters

¹ Muriel St Clare Byrne, ed. *The Lisle Letters* 6 vols. (Chicago 1981) cited henceforward as *Letters*

² Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Lady Honor Lisle's Networks of Influence" in M. Eler and M. Kowaleski, eds., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens, Georgia 1988) gives a brief account of her life considered primarily in terms of the networks of patronage, power and relationship that concerned her.

³ *Letters*, vol. 1 pp. 313-314 for the children's dates of birth; references to

by his first marriage. He died in 1528, leaving Honor a comfortable widow with a life interest in the manors of Tehidy and Uंबरleigh, with other lands. We know virtually nothing about their relationship, but Sir John Basset's memorial brass, arranged by Honor, bore the images of both his wives. Approximately a year after Basset's death Honor married Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle.

Arthur Plantagenet was the illegitimate son of King Edward IV by Elizabeth Wayte (or Lucy). Although he was raised initially in obscurity, Arthur's royal birth was recognised, and he entered royal service in 1501 in the household of his half-sister Elizabeth of York. He remained in royal service after the queen's death, and around November 1511 married Elizabeth Grey, widow of Edmund Dudley. Little is known about Elizabeth's personality (there are no extant letters either to or from her), but David Waas, writing in 1958, considered her 'a quiet woman who accepted her passive female role in a man's society'.⁴ In 1522 Elizabeth inherited the Lisle barony in her own right, and the king appointed Arthur Viscount Lisle. Women could inherit the barony but the senior title of viscount was only borne by men. The grant of the viscountcy was accompanied by grants of land notably in Sussex, but they were in practice life grants, and the heir to the Lisle estate remained Elizabeth's son John Dudley. When Elizabeth died around 1526, however, Lisle kept the title and some of the property including the manor of Painswick and an agreement was made with Dudley that Painswick should be used for Arthur Lisle's second wife's jointure.⁵

After their marriage Arthur and Honor together with her seven children and probably also two of her Basset stepdaughters settled at Soberton in Hampshire. Her second marriage brought Honor greater social prominence, illustrated by her presence as one of Anne Boleyn's ladies when Anne accompanied the King on his visit to Calais in October 1532. Calais was shortly to become of vital importance in her life, for in March 1533 the King appointed his uncle Arthur Lisle to be his Deputy in Calais.

Letters are given thus: no. refers to a numbered letter, p. refers to a page in the text. Most references are to volume and letter number only.

⁴ David Arthur Waas, *Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle, and the Administration of Calais 1533-1540* (Unpublished PhD. thesis, University of Illinois, 1958) p. 10. Waas' apparent approval of Elizabeth shows an implicit disapproval of Honor Lisle for not accepting this passive role.

⁵ Waas, *op. cit.* pp.14, 228

Arthur Lisle was already elderly, and distinguished by little except his base born royalty, though he had held office. In addition to serving on commissions of the peace, he was sheriff of Hampshire, lieutenant of Porchester Castle, and most significantly was appointed vice-admiral (to Richmond's admiral) in 1526. It has been suggested that the King appointed him to Calais as a convenient way of getting rid of a potentially dangerous Yorkist noble,⁶ but this seems unlikely. The Tudors had tended to reduce the independence of the Deputies of Calais, after the use of Calais as a springboard for rebellion in the fifteenth century, but this would hardly encourage Henry to send a potential Yorkist to Calais. More likely Henry appointed Lisle as someone who had suitable experience, who had a suitably elevated social position, and for whom he did not have a more urgent need at home. Only after Lisle began to show his ineffectiveness, troubling Cromwell over little things, did concern about Lisle's competence begin to be demonstrated, as for example in the setting up of the Calais commission of 1535, over Lisle's head. In 1533 however such problems were not yet anticipated. Having made arrangements for the placing of some of the children Lord and Lady Lisle arrived in Calais on 2nd June 1533,⁷ at the start of the seven year period of office which provides the context of the *Letters*.

Calais, which was of course England's sole remaining possession in France at this time, had an emotional value to the English crown, as Foxe's famous account of Mary Tudor's death bed makes clear.⁸ Commercially however it was no longer so important, since the Staple, the great wool market, which was once the dominant force in Calais, was now in decline. The amount of raw wool available for the staple was reduced by the growth of the English cloth trade, and the market was also affected by the competition from cheaper (if inferior) Spanish wool. The king, a major creditor, more than once had to ease the situation by renegotiating his loans and rearranging the terms on which the company worked. One consequence of this was that the Staple Hall eventually became Lord Lisle's official residence.⁹

⁶ John Leese, *The History of Calais under the Deputyship of Arthur Plantagenet, Lord Lisle 1533-1540* (Unpublished M.A. thesis Manchester University 1929) p. 10

⁷ John Gough Nichols, ed *The Chronicle of Calais*, Camden Society vol. 35. (London 1846) p. 44

⁸ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. 8 pp. 624-625

⁹ John Leese, *The History of Calais* pp. 19-23

As well as its commercial function, Calais was a garrison town, a fortified English enclave surrounded by frequently hostile foreign territory. As the commercial importance of Calais declined, so it developed an 'ever-increasing military atmosphere'.¹⁰ The military side of Calais had its own problems. The fortifications were in need of repair, ordinary soldiers ('petty wages') were badly paid and difficult to recruit¹¹, and victualling was a constant problem. Because sieges were a constant fear, large stocks were supposed to be maintained both by the garrison and by the civilian community. However these were not necessarily satisfactory, and the stores of grain in the soldiers' garner were four years old and unfit to use. Moreover ordinary basic needs of food and fuel were expensive and difficult to obtain.¹²

Although there were social contacts between the inhabitants of Calais and their French neighbours, there seems at least in the upper reaches of Calais society to have been a somewhat hothouse-like colonial atmosphere, as befitting a relatively small and enclosed society. This exacerbated another problem, that of faction. Instead of remaining aloof from this the Lises were drawn into disputes, and had their favourites and their enemies. The part they played in the distribution of patronage and favours makes clear that it was worth while asking for their help.¹³

Lord Lisle as might be expected was primarily occupied with the affairs of Calais, though his own private affairs were not forgotten when he left England. For Lady Lisle however the management of the Basset estates remained one of her most important concerns. These were the lands left as her jointure by Sir John Basset, which would ultimately become her son's, and also John's own lands. Wardship arrangements seem to have given Honor control of these, especially when Lisle obtained John's wardship himself.¹⁴ After Honor's remarriage officials and friends dealing with Basset estate matters in Devon continued to consult her rather than Arthur. There are many examples, especially from UMBERLEIGH, which was the main Basset place of residence, and where Honor was clearly well respected. An early

¹⁰ P. T. Jane Morgan, *The Government of Calais 1485-1558* (Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford 1966) p.45

¹¹ Morgan op. cit, p. 132

¹² Morgan, *Government of Calais*, p.189. Leese, *History of Calais*, p. 27

¹³ See below, p. 145 for an example of their involvement in a faction dispute.

¹⁴ The wardship was first bought by John Worth, a Devon neighbour, in collaboration with Honor. *Letters*, vol. 1 p. 315 citing P.R.O. Wards 9/149m. 14, and Wards 9/150 f. 392. *Letters*, vol. 1 p. 316

example, before Honor moved to Calais, had Sir John Bonde, the parson of Atherington in whose parish Umberleigh lay, reporting to his lady the deterioration in 'your place' caused by the dreadful weather in what he described as the worst winter for twenty years. The buttery door needed renewal, new timber and lead were necessary as well as a gutter and new thatching, with the ominous comment 'with other things, the which will be charges'.¹⁵ There are many similar examples of Honor's being involved in the everyday problems of the Devon estates despite being first in Hampshire and then far away in Calais.¹⁶

Perhaps the most important matters concerning land were those relating to inheritance. By a complex agreement made between Sir John Basset and Lord Daubeney, the Bassets obtained a reversionary interest in the Beaumont lands, which were currently held by Daubeney. Honor spent much time effort and money in trying to secure the Beaumont lands for her son John Basset. Daubeney for his part considered using the lands as a source of income by felling the woods to sell the timber¹⁷ (which would reduce the value of the lands) and also more worryingly proposed to lease the lands to Edward Seymour, for term of Seymour's life.¹⁸ Husee had regretfully to assure Lady Lisle that this was within the law and could not be prevented.¹⁹ Lady Lisle was advised that the best way to deal with the problem was to buy the lands outright from Daubeney, who it was thought would sell. In December 1535 Husee advised that 'though your lordship gave a large sum of money to have the lands in your possession, paying the rent of assize to the said Lord Daubeney, it should be the best money that ever you bestowed'.²⁰ The Lisles unfortunately could

¹⁵ *Letters*, vol. 1 no. xxvi

¹⁶ A notable example is a long running saga concerning the demolition of the weir at Umberleigh, following a royal decree against private weirs which were believed to interfere with shipping. Honor expected, but did not receive, special treatment. *Letters*, vol. 2 nos. 497, 507; vol. 5 no. 1131

¹⁷ e.g. *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 244; vol. 2 no. 448

¹⁸ M. L. Bush, "The Lisle-Seymour Land Disputes: a study of power and influence in the 1530s" *Historical Journal* 9 (1966) 255-274 gives an account of this dispute and a separate dispute between Lisle and Seymour over lands formerly belonging to Lisle's first wife.

¹⁹ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1176

²⁰ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 496

not spare the necessary sums, which George Rolle suggested might be as much as a thousand marks.²¹

A possible solution to the problem was suggested by Cromwell, who cast covetous eyes on another Lisle property, Painswick. Painswick had been assigned as part of Lady Lisle's jointure, but Cromwell wanted it so that he could sell it on to Sir William Kingston. Husee's advice was that Painswick should be given to Cromwell in exchange for the assurance of his help over the Beaumont lands.²² It became clear that Lisle, while on a visit to England had promised Cromwell that he could have Painswick, and said that Lady Lisle would give the necessary consent. Unfortunately Arthur Lisle seems to have omitted to inform his wife of this, leaving her to find out from Husee when she herself arrived in Canterbury on a visit to England. Honor's comment is restrained, but her annoyance is clear: 'My lord, what may I now do herein, your promise everyway considered?'.²³ Lisle though hastened to assure his wife that he knew Cromwell 'will see you be no loser', but he also admitted he had told the Lord Privy Seal that 'I would do the best I could with you, trusting you would be ruled by me'.²⁴ Arthur Lisle clearly saw himself as the head of the family, whatever other people might think.

On her arrival at court Honor (having first been put off, and then given an appointment at the awkward hour of six in the morning) saw Cromwell. She raised with him the various points at issue: Lord Lisle's promised annuity from the king, 'the taking of possession of my son's lands', and finally 'forasmuch as he moved me not for Painswick' she introduced the subject herself. Lady Lisle assured the minister that she had turned down other offers for Painswick, but was prepared to consider his, because he had always been good lord to her. She trusted, she told him, that 'he would see me no loser', and also that he wanted Painswick for himself, not for anyone else such as Mr Kingston. Cromwell seems not to have rebuked her impertinence, but solemnly promised her that this was indeed the case. After further delay, and instructions from Arthur than Honor should proceed tactfully²⁵ Lady Lisle wrote to

²¹ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1222

²² *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1259

²³ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1263

²⁴ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1267 A wife's consent was necessary for the alienation of lands assigned to her jointure.

²⁵ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1281

inform her husband that she had surrendered her right to Painswick. Cromwell agreed to pay them an annual rent of £120, but at the same time he claimed the thousand pounds 'which was your interest after the death of your wives' as recompense for his help. He did though keep his word about the Beaumont lands. Lord Daubeney (now the Earl of Bridgewater) entered into a recognizance to cancel his agreement with Seymour.²⁶ Cromwell was less honourable about Painswick, which was duly passed on to Kingston.²⁷

The Lisles sought Cromwell's favour over the Beaumont lands. The Lisle correspondence provide many further illustrations of the importance of favours in Tudor England. The Lisles were on the giving as well as the receiving end of the favours system. Lisle's position as Lord Deputy in Calais put much patronage at his disposal and people of all types did not hesitate to apply for this. The first 'begging letter' included in the *Lisle Letters* after his appointment was announced was one recommending a brewer,²⁸ followed shortly by one from the Duchess of Suffolk asking Lisle to give 'the room of a soldier' to one John Williams, the bearer of the letter²⁹ Supplicants for favours were well aware of Lady Lisle's influence on her husband, and in practice if not in theory she was seen as having 'a role in the administration of the town and pale'.³⁰ Both men and women wrote to her and often explicitly asked her to refer their pleas to Lord Lisle. An early example of this is provided by George Taylor, Receiver General to Anne Boleyn. He wrote on behalf of 'Mr George Gaynesford's son of Calais' (probably his cousin) saying 'I pray you to desire my lord to take him in service'.³¹ Lady Lisle assured Cromwell's man Popley that she did not take bribes, but this may simply be a matter of definition.³² Certainly she was prepared to accept gifts, like most of her contemporaries from the King downwards. Ralph Broke, a Calais Spear, for instance sent two cheeses to encourage

²⁶ *Letters*, vol. 5 p. 312

²⁷ The Kingstons were evidently meant to continue the annual payments of £120, since in 1556 Honor won a Chancery case over a dispute with Sir Anthony Kingston about this. P.R.O. C 78/9/16, and below p. 153

²⁸ *Letters*, vol. 1 no. 1

²⁹ *Letters*, vol. 1 no. 5

³⁰ Waas, *Arthur Plantagenet*, p. 236

³¹ *Letters*, vol. 1 no. 35

³² Waas, *Arthur Plantagenet* p.237 citing *Letters and Papers* vol. 10 no. 1128

Lady Lisle in 'moving your husband' over a Calais appointment.³³ Sometimes the Lisles' friends or social equals, such as Bishop Gardiner, put forward the names of people they wished to help,³⁴ as did the Lisles' own dependants.³⁵

As has been indicated, the Lisles too sought favours, often by means of sending 'tokens' or gifts. Tokens were usually small items sent as a symbol of regard and often with the implication that a favour was being sought.³⁶ When Lady Lisle was trying to get her daughter Anne Basset into Queen Jane Seymour's service, she sent tokens to everyone she thought might help her. One letter from Husee refers to tokens he had delivered to Lord and Lady Sussex, Mrs Staynings, 'my lady's maids', Mrs Coffin, Mrs Margery [Horsman], Mrs Lilgrave, Colpeper, and Lady Wallop, to whom 'a little diamond' was sent.³⁷ Nor were the royal family omitted from this barrage of tokens and gifts. As well as food gifts which are considered below, unusual examples included the gift to Anne Boleyn of a linnet, 'a pleasant singing bird'. At perhaps more personal sacrifice Lady Lisle also gave the queen Purquoy, a little dog. Purquoy had originally been given to Sir Francis Bryan because he pressed Lady Lisle for it (and the Lisles wished for his good favour) but Bryan had to hand Purquoy over to the queen 'not above an hour' after he received it.³⁸

Relations with royalty were always likely to be fraught with difficulty, if not danger. Lady Lisle's attempts to get her daughters into royal service were only partly successful, as will be seen. The King promised Arthur Lisle an annuity, but there was some uncertainty about the amount, and when it came it was not so much as he had apparently promised, a mere £200 instead of the £400 that was first indicated.³⁹ There were though some highlights in this uneasy relationship with the King. On her visit to London in late 1538, Honor Lisle was delighted to be the recipient of royal attentions. She was summoned to attend the court at four o'clock in the afternoon,

³³ *Letters*, vol. 2 nos. 330, 331

³⁴ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 216

³⁵ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 245 gives an example of a priest looking for a position, put forward by Thomas Warley.

³⁶ Lady Lisle sent many tokens to members of Anne Boleyn's household and sent hose to the Countess of Wiltshire shortly before the queen's disgrace. *Letters*, vol. 2 nos. 299, 299a, vol. 3 no. 673

³⁷ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 887

³⁸ Purquoy was killed in a fall, and nobody but the King dared tell Anne Boleyn what had happened. *Letters*, vol. 2 nos. 193, (the linnet) 109, 114, 299a (Purquoy)

³⁹ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1215, 1316

where she was taken to 'a lodging which was prepared for me' where she found 'a rich bed furnished, and nothing lacking for me nor my folks'. With other noble guests, the Duke and Duchess of Suffolk and the Earls of Hertford and Sussex and their ladies, she was entertained to supper, followed by a banquet. At the banquet, which Lady Lisle rather naively considered 'the best that ever I was at, and was partly made for me' the King politely asked after Lord Lisle, and regretted his absence. The following day the same party dined, and after dinner 'his Grace showed us all the commodities of his palace, so that it was night ere we came thence'.⁴⁰ Lady Lisle, greatly excited, described all these activities in letters to Arthur. What Honor did not write, though she may have known, was that on those same days her husband's cousin the Countess of Salisbury was being interrogated together with other members of her family. Honor Lisle's letters to her husband stuck very firmly to private and personal business matters with no political comment, though it is unlikely that she had no political opinions of her own.

Though the letters exchanged between Lord and Lady Lisle during their periods of separation give no indication of Honor's political opinions, they are a vital source of information about the personal relations between the two. Unlike for example the Earl and Countess of Northumberland or Lord and Lady Rochford, it can confidently be stated that Lord and Lady Lisle had a happy marriage. The fact that this was a second marriage for both of the parties does not in itself indicate any kind of romance between them - a second marriage was as likely to be for financial reasons, or reasons purely of convenience, as any other. We do not know whether the marriage was arranged mutually, or whether the initiative came from one side. Again the latter position would not rule out a comfortable marriage. Even Lawrence Stone, who took a somewhat cool view of sixteenth century marriage, wrote that 'in a considerable number of cases, some degree of affection, or at least a good working partnership, developed after the marriage.'⁴¹ The Lisle marriage certainly gave Honor great social advantages; the difference between Bassets and Plantagenets is made

⁴⁰ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1269, 1270

⁴¹ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth 1979 edition) p. 82

apparent by the correspondence over Frances Plantagenet's possible disparagement by her marriage to John Basset.⁴²

Whatever the reasons for their marriage, however, the letters between them make the great affection between Arthur and Honor evident. Arthur Lisle particularly expressed himself with great warmth. He addressed her as 'sweetheart', 'mine own sweetheart', 'mine own' 'my very heart root and entirely beloved bedfellow'.⁴³ During her absence in London in November 1538 he missed her dreadfully. He did not sleep at night, waking at two in the morning and failing to sleep thereafter.⁴⁴ 'For my part I never loved none so well, neither thought so long for none since I knew a woman; as God knoweth, to whom I put all my trust to be your aid and mine'⁴⁵ Others noticed how Arthur faced his wife's absence. William London, Keeper of the Staple Inn (Lisle's residence at this time) described Lord Lisle as saying that 'there was never child desired more the nurse than he desireth your ladyship'.⁴⁶

This might seem to suggest an unequal relationship, or even that the elderly Arthur Lisle was unduly emotionally dependent on his wife. Waas commented that Lady Lisle 'felt it her duty to inject stamina into her husband's spine'. This suggests that Honor was aware of this emotional dependence and its possible dangers.⁴⁷ Honor was less effusive than her husband in her expressions of affection, but the affection is still marked. The day after she arrived in England she wrote 'I shall think every hour x till I be with you again'.⁴⁸ Despite her exciting reception by the king, Honor still longed to be at home with her husband; 'for surely I shall never be merry till I see you'.⁴⁹ A further sign of the loving relationship between the Lisles is shown by their gentle mutual teasing, for example that in Honor's absence he would dine at the early hour of ten o'clock, and 'keep little company' because he would be mourning her absence. Honor claimed he would not keep to this regime,⁵⁰ and Arthur acknowledged that he had not dined by ten o'clock every day, because of the

⁴² See below p. 129

⁴³ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1216, 1267, 1215, 1267

⁴⁴ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1267, 1280

⁴⁵ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1267

⁴⁶ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1289

⁴⁷ Waas, *Arthur Plantagenet*, p. 276

⁴⁸ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1262

⁴⁹ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1284

⁵⁰ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1270

unavoidable feasting he had been given, but he also told her that if he was too busy to mourn by day, he could not sleep at night.⁵¹

Neither of the Lisles explicitly stated their views on the nature of marriage, but while the correspondence is not of a type where this would be expected, there are some clues to their beliefs. Monsieur de Bours, the host of Mary Basset in France, died, and Madame asked Mary to inform her mother. Mary described her as being 'in great distress, as you may believe'. Lady Lisle wrote swiftly to sympathise with her friend, for within eleven days of the news being sent to Calais, Madame de Bours was acknowledging the condolences, saying 'It is a grief hard to endure, and no worse misfortune could have befallen me'.⁵² This may have been mere formality, but the choice of words, including 'calamity' earlier in the letter, suggests a real grief. There is also an example of the Lisles supporting a couple in a marriage which was against the wishes of the bride's parents. Margaret Grenville, daughter of Sir Richard Grenville, Marshal of Calais, fell in love with Richard Lee, the Surveyor of Calais. Grenville, a kinsman of Lady Lisle, disapproved. The young man was the son of a stonemason, not fit to match with a Grenville. He was also, however, highly talented, making far more money than Grenville realised at first, and most importantly he was a protégé of Thomas Cromwell. This last fact makes the motives of Lord and Lady Lisle less straightforward than might at first appear. They supported the young couple, but they will also have been well aware that this support will have done them no harm in the eyes of the Lord Privy Seal, though it will not necessarily have improved their popularity with the Calais establishment. It should also be noted that despite their kinship, relations between the Lisles, especially Lady Lisle, and the Grenvilles, were not particularly friendly.⁵³ Margaret Grenville and Richard Lee took advantage of the archaic marriage law to plight their troth by *verba de praesenti*, a civil contract which though without the blessing of the church was still binding. It is possible that Lady Lisle took Margaret Grenville into her household for a time; Husee refers in a letter to Lisle to his lordship 'demerit[ing] manifold thanks and kindness for the good entertainment of Mr Surveyor's new contracted wife'. He added referring to Cromwell 'my lord taketh the same in good part'. So the Lisles' support for Lee and

⁵¹ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1280

⁵² *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 617, 618

⁵³ Waas, *Arthur Plantagenet*, p. 102

Margaret may have been motivated by self interest, but it does also suggest that as a happily married, loving couple themselves, they were sympathetic to love in others, especially when as in this case young Lee was really a much better match than his prospective father-in-law believed. In a letter which commented on the 'great displeasure' which the Lises had received for their support of 'Mr Surveyor's wife', Sir Thomas Palmer revealed that Cromwell believed Lee could have done much better for himself; if 'the Surveyor had showed him that he would a'married he would a'gotten him a wife should a'spent a hundred pound a year, and worth a thousand pound'. According to Palmer, Cromwell was as sorry about the match as Grenville, though for different reasons. The minister might be prepared to forward Lee's desires, but he obviously had a much more business-like approach to marriage than his young friend. A further instance of Lady Lisle showing sympathy for young love is her reaction to the secret engagement of her daughter Mary and Gabriel de Montmorency.⁵⁴

Entertainment by the king, and clandestine marriages, were not everyday occurrences in Lady Lisle's life. As might be expected, much of the correspondence concerns mundane matters such as food and clothing. While the household will have made or obtained basic foodstuffs locally, more specialised items especially those classed as 'spices' were frequently ordered from London. Typical lists include such items as 'xij sugar loaves, a piece of great raisins, a tapnet of figs'; 'succats, cinnamon, comfits, biscuits, caraways'; 'almonds, rice and raisins'.⁵⁵ Entertaining for special occasions such as Christmas was on a large scale. A bill of 9th December 1537 came to £12 12 s and includes the usual spices and delicacies in huge quantities: four pounds each of ginger and cinnamon, and two hundred weight of prunes as well as exotics like nutmeg, aniseed and tornsall.⁵⁶

As well as being used for the normal provisioning of the household and domestic entertaining, food had other social purposes. Gifts of food seem to have been acceptable both between friends and between patrons and clients, with some foods, notably types of game, being particularly popular. Honor's brother-in-law

⁵⁴ *Letters*, vol. 4 nos. 989, 1000, 1011; see also *ibid.* pp. 361-2, 385-7 For Mary's engagement see below, pp. 150-151

⁵⁵ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 497; vol. 4 no. 854a; vol. 5 no. 1355

⁵⁶ *Letters*, vol. 4 p. 457 Tornsall is a violet colouring derived from a heliotrope or a sunflower (*O. E. D.*)

Thomas St Aubyn sent gifts of puffins from Devon more than once, and received conies from the Basset estate at Tehidy.⁵⁷ Venison was another popular gift between friends, and for a special occasion such as John Basset's wedding friends might be asked directly to supply it.⁵⁸ The Lisles in their turn sent gifts of food. Fresh spring fruit and vegetables, such as peascods and cherries, were available in Calais before they were ready in England, and there was competition to be the first person to send them. The aim was to present such delicacies to the court, but much depended on luck and the vagaries of the season. In June 1536 Lady Lisle was told that 'here was cherries enow, before your first cherries came, at iiij^d a pound', but in the following spring on the contrary 'as for peascods or cherries, there will be none here, I think, a'this side midsummer. Whensoever they come your ladyship shall demerit high thanks'.⁵⁹

Like other Tudor housewives, Lady Lisle took pride in the making of preserves (or at least overseeing the work of others). Her particular speciality was a quince preserve or codiniac. Quinces were a highly prized fruit: at the end of the sixteenth century Lady Fettiplace had twice as many recipes for quinces in her cookery book as for any other fruit.⁶⁰ Honor sent gifts of codiniac to the King, which he evidently liked.⁶¹ We know from reference to recipes that Lady Lisle was herself involved in the jam making process, though whether she stood stirring the hot pans may be doubted.

A particularly favourite delicacy was quails, and these little birds play a large part in the correspondence.⁶² Quails, sometimes already in a condition to be cooked, were sent as gifts, both to friends and to those whose favour was being sought. As usual the monarch was a target for gifts, and Jane Seymour was especially fond of

⁵⁷ *Letters*, vol. 1 no xxxvi, vol. 2 no. 277

⁵⁸ *Letters* vol. 4 nos 859, 860

⁵⁹ *Letters*, vol. 5 no 1427, vol 4 nos. 849, 881

⁶⁰ Hilary Spurling, *Flmor Fettiplace's Receipt Book*, (Harmondsworth 1987) p. 201. According to Lady Fettiplace's recipe the quince preserve was not runny like a modern jam, but was boiled down to a stiff paste.

⁶¹ *Letters*, vol 5 nos 1149, 1154, 1155 She also exchanged recipes for codiniac and other fruit preserves with Archdeacon Thomas Thirlby when he was her guest. Honor may well, as Byrne suggests, have used this mutual interest in jam making to further an advantageous acquaintance *Letters* vol 5 nos. 1237, 1249

⁶² See for example *Letters* vol 2 no 241, vol 4 nos. 879, 888, 894.

quails.⁶³ There are also suggestions that the Lisles traded commercially in quails. One of those who seems to have bought and resold quails was Mr Skut the Queen's tailor, who on one occasion was awaiting a consignment of twenty dozen.⁶⁴

Skut was the Queen's tailor, and Lady Lisle was buying her clothes at what in the twentieth century would be the *haute couture* level.⁶⁵ Clothes were very important to Lady Lisle, and she was very conscious of the need to dress as became the wife of a viscount and the Deputy's lady. The historian David Waas criticised Lady Lisle for 'her extravagance in buying things for personal adornment' which he considered 'startling'.⁶⁶ However a very little study of the portraits of the Tudor era makes it plain that Lady Lisle was far from unusual in her extravagant adornment.⁶⁷ What is unusual is surely rather that we know just how much Lady Lisle was prepared to pay for her clothes and jewels. She did have a perhaps excessive concern that her clothes should be of the latest fashion, and of the highest quality. In her defence it could be said that she was largely out of touch with London fashions, and relied on the faithful Husee who had a good eye for fashion and quality for advice. Lady Lisle's clothes figure very largely in the correspondence, and it must be remembered that Honor was buying by a primitive form of mail-order. Lady Lisle told John Hussee her requirements (fabric, colour, style etc.) and Hussee then tried to satisfy them. Sometimes Hussee sent a sample or 'muster' of the fabric for her consideration. In view of the costs involved (a relatively ordinary velvet might be 12s the yard, a fine Lucca velvet perhaps as much as 26s 8d⁶⁸) it was as well to ensure that Lady Lisle was satisfied before the cloth was bought. At times Hussee had great difficulty in finding exactly what his lady wanted. A hunt for cloth of silver was abandoned when Hussee could find nothing satisfactory except at the astonishing price of forty shillings

⁶³ *Letters* vol. 4 nos. 881, 887

⁶⁴ *Letters* vol. 5 nos. 1427, 1451, 1457a

⁶⁵ Alison Sim comments that 'in real terms clothes made of these materials [silk, velvet, cloth of gold] cost even more than designer-original clothes cost today'. Alison Sim, *Food and Feast in Tudor England* (Stroud 1997) pp. 2-3

⁶⁶ Waas, *Arthur Plantagenet*, p. 239

⁶⁷ See many of the portraits reproduced in Karen Hearn, ed. *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630* (London 1995) especially for example p. 68, Hans Eworth's portrait of Lady Mary Neville and her son Lord Dacre, p. 70, Eworth 'Margaret Audley, Duchess of Norfolk', and p.72, Eworth 'An Unknown Lady'. (perhaps a member of the Wentworth family).

⁶⁸ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 544, vol. 5 no. 1442

the yard (though it should be noted that she had at least four pairs of sleeves of cloth of gold)⁶⁹. Once the fabric was bought, the garment was made up by Skut or another tailor to the required design.

Whether or not Lady Lisle was typical of her peers in her interest and taste in dress, there is no doubt that her wardrobe was expensive. She tried to deal with this problem to some extent by the simple device of postponing the payment of bills. The unfortunate Hussee was left to mediate between his patrons and their tradesmen. Skut made Lady Lisle a satin gown in summer 1534, and when he delivered it boldly asked that he should be paid around Michaelmas. However despite what might seem quite comfortable credit terms, Skut still had not been paid by December 1536, leading to Husee's masterly understatement 'I perceive by him he is not pleased'.⁷⁰ Holt the mercer was similarly kept waiting for his money, and resorted to threatening Hussee with arrest for the debt. Lady Lisle seems totally to have failed to understand Husee's concerns, and even rebuked him for pushing Holt's claims.⁷¹

Food and clothes have been seen to pay a large part in the *Letters*. We have less information about the pastimes with which Lady Lisle filled her leisure time, but can make some deductions. She had some pet animals, including Purquoy the dog and singing birds,⁷² and was more than once given presents of monkeys.⁷³ Music plays little part in the letters, but the household seems to have supported its own choir, perhaps for the chapel services, and Anne, Mary and James Basset all received some music lessons.⁷⁴ There seems to be no mention of Lady Lisle herself playing a musical instrument or singing, though the children's musical education makes it clear that such accomplishments were valued.⁷⁵ In the 1520s Lord Lisle had kept a company of minstrels, and perhaps also a group of players, and this interest seems to have been maintained when he was Lord Deputy. There is evidence of plays or

⁶⁹ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 230; vol. 6 pp.199-200, 203-204. The inventory also includes two pairs of sleeves in 'tynsen' and 'tyssue' which might be cloth of silver. Cloths of gold and silver came under the restrictions of the sumptuary laws, but these would not have applied to Lady Lisle since she was both aristocratic and female. Wilfrid Hooper, "The Tudor Sumptuary Laws", *E.H.R.* 30 (1915) pp. 433-449

⁷⁰ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 241, vol.3 no 792a

⁷¹ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 792a, 798a; vol. 4 nos 855a, 863

⁷² *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1589, vol. 2 no. 193, vol. 3 nos.1382, 1405

⁷³ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 290a, vol. 3 no. 797

⁷⁴ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 572, 583a, 587, 688; vol. 4 no. 1048, vol.6 p.194

⁷⁵ James learnt to sing and dance, the girls to play the virginals, lute and spinet.

interludes being put on in Calais⁷⁶ and there were a dozen 'maskyn gownes' in the Lisle inventory.⁷⁷

In a letter to Madame de Bours in which she described suitable activities for Mary Basset, Lady Lisle referred to her 'work', and she and the ladies of her household spent at least some of their time in needlework. She had exacting standards which suggest she may have enjoyed this traditionally 'feminine' occupation. Some of the colours of silk she required were difficult to find: on one occasion the merchant, Mr Judd could 'by no means find in all London' the colours for which she sought. On this occasion it is tempting to suspect that for once Lady Lisle was not being over demanding, but the merchant rather lazy, since five days later Husee reported that Judd had now found the right colour.⁷⁸ Finding patterns for embroidery could pose problems. It might be possible to copy a pattern from someone else's work, provided a suitably skilled person could be found to copy it.⁷⁹ Cushions, the main item for embroidery, would provide welcome comfort as well as occupation, and the inventory lists around seventy of them throughout the Deputy's residence, including 'xxij Cusshens nedle worke of dyvers sortes' in Lady Lisle's dining chamber.⁸⁰

Gambling was a popular entertainment in wealthy circles, though Lady Lisle was somewhat reluctant for her daughters to take part. We know that Honor herself played cards at least sometimes. Her cousin Thomas Leygh, apologised for not bidding her farewell properly because when he came to take his leave of her 'your ladyship was at your pastime of cards' and he did not want to disturb her. Another guest, John Hutton Governor of the Merchant Adventurers, warned her to prepare 'white money' (silver coins) so that he could take his revenge on her playing at glee.⁸¹ Serious gambling at dice, which depended entirely on chance rather than any element of skill, was regarded differently from cards, and Honor seems to have disapproved of this. A letter from Sir Thomas Elyot the humanist scholar, concerning a young acquaintance of his, makes this point. The young man, Thomas Raynsforde, son of a

⁷⁶ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1241, 1242

⁷⁷ *Letters*, vol. 6 p. 201

⁷⁸ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1136a, 1141 On another occasion Frances Basset reported that five of the cushions Lady Lisle wanted were finished, and only her own was not yet complete because she needed the right green silk. *Letters* vol. 5 no. 1293

⁷⁹ *Letters*, vol. 4 nos. 844, 848a

⁸⁰ *Letters*, vol. 4 nos. 844, 846, 848a, 891; vol. 6 pp. 193-203

⁸¹ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 129; vol. 4, no. 869

friend of Elyot's, was a member of Lisle's household. He had, in the stern Elyot's opinion, 'too much delighted in dicing', and had spent all his money rather than saving it to 'honestly furnish him in serving my lord and you'. Lady Lisle, perhaps in response to a previous word from the boy's family, had rebuked him for his gambling. Elyot approved her attitude, urging her to 'withdraw him [Raynesforde] with your sharp admonition and commandment' if she perceived 'excess in gaming' or other 'lack in him touching his service'.⁸²

Lady Lisle embroidered, she made jam, she probably listened to music. She does not however seem to have spent much of her leisure time in reading, though it can be assumed that she could read. There are a few references to books being sent to her as presents; Richard Hore, one of the visiting Lent preachers in Calais, sent her a spiritual book, which he described as 'the buckler to defend us from all troubles of mind, and the sword wherewith we overcome our spiritual enemies'. He urged her to 'read it reverently and diligently'. Honor might have had more pleasure from another unidentified book sent by her friend Mrs Whalley, which was described as 'a little book, limned, of parchment or vellum' suggesting an illuminated manuscript.⁸³ Mary Basset, sending presents home from France, sent her mother a gospel, but with the comment 'to carry with your paternoster' implying a book for ornament rather than use. What is missing here is any example of the lighter reading which was condemned by educationalists such as Vives.⁸⁴ The inventory lists only two books, a mass book in the chapel, and a 'great bible' in Lady Lisle's chamber. Either the other books (including some presented by friends to Lisle) had disappeared by 1540, or they were not considered sufficiently important for the inventory. In this case Lady Lisle may have had a romance or two which the surveyors missed, but we have no indication of it.⁸⁵

As might be expected much of the Lisle correspondence concerns the various children of the Lord Deputy and his lady. Ultimately there was to be no mutual child

⁸² *Letters*, vol. 1 no. 90

⁸³ *Letters*, vol. 3 no 743; vol. 4 no. 857

⁸⁴ J. L. Vives listed books he considered unsuitable for young girls in his *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, and repeated some of them in the chapter *De Disciplina Feminae* in *De Officio Mariti (The Duty of Husbands)*. See Foster Watson ed. *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, pp. 59, 196, and see also above pp. 24-26

⁸⁵ *Letters*, vol. 6 pp. 193, 202

of Arthur and Honor Lisle, no 'Plantagenet heir' but for a considerable period in 1536 and 1537 they believed that parenthood was imminent. In November 1536, at the age of around 43,⁸⁶ Honor Lisle discovered herself to be pregnant. Arthur Lisle was the father of daughters but lacked a male heir 'that that name survive and spring anew' and both Arthur, and their friends on his behalf, wished for a son.⁸⁷ The news spread, and friends began to send their congratulations and appropriate gifts, while the King himself gave his congratulations when Husee presented Lisle's New Year's gift.⁸⁸ Even at this stage the pregnancy may have appeared less than straightforward. In a somewhat obscure letter Felicia Hertforde, a former neighbour of Lady Lisle's in London, and apparently a midwife, offered her services regarding 'the estate of your body' in which 'I know your ladyship is not so much in comfort as you hoped in God to have been'.⁸⁹

Husee now began to make the preparations necessary for the birth of so important a personage as the Plantagenet heir. Any woman who could afford to do so would retire to her chamber for a month, and the chamber must be specially prepared for the occasion.⁹⁰ The custom seem to have been to borrow wherever possible, and the most prestigious person from whom to borrow was the King himself. Husee and other Lisle staff made many attempts to borrow traverses (a type of hanging) from the Royal Wardrobe,⁹¹ and other items from friends such as Lady Sussex who promised several pieces of fine bedding including a 'rich pane for a bed, of ermines covered with cloth of gold'.⁹² Old silver vessels were remade for the christening. Lady Lisle's maternity clothes were delivered: a damask gown 'larger than that your ladyship hath already', a nightgown and waistcoats. (Waistcoats were clearly worn by pregnant women, since Frances Basset also had one made during pregnancy.) Lady Lisle's anxiety may be shown by her dissatisfaction with these clothes, which Husee tried to

⁸⁶ According to Byrne, Arthur Lisle was born 1462-64, and Honor 1493-95. See *Letters*, vol. 1 pp 145, 303-305

⁸⁷ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 786

⁸⁸ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 910

⁸⁹ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 810

⁹⁰ Adrian Wilson, "The ceremony of childbirth and its interpretation" in Valerie Fildes ed., *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (London 1990) pp. 75-77

⁹¹ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 864a

⁹² *Letters*, vol. 4 nos. 868a, 870 Lady Sussex's bedding could not be delivered immediately as it had already been borrowed by Lady Beauchamp, showing the complex friendship networks that supported the 'ceremony of childbirth'.

allay by reassuring her that they were 'even in every point made as my Lady Beauchamp's; and it is the very fashion that the Queen and all the ladies doth wear'.⁹³

By the middle of May 1537 Honor herself seems to have had some doubts about the progress of her pregnancy. She had after all had seven children already and should have known the signs. She told Husee that she had 'over-reckoned' herself. He continued to wish her a 'fortunate hour' and look forward to a celebratory velvet coat when a son was born.⁹⁴ By early July friends were beginning to inquire with some concern if she had yet been brought to bed,⁹⁵ but there was no suggestion even now that this was anything but genuine.⁹⁶ On 23rd August however Husee wrote a long consolatory letter, hoping all might yet be well, but acknowledging that 'it might chance otherwise'. He comforted her with thoughts of the will of God, and other women who were not spared suffering if God so wished it. He had heard, he said, that she 'weepeth and sorroweth without comparison'. To encourage her he told of a woman who had expected to be delivered before Whitsuntide, and had only within the last six days given birth to a 'fair daughter'.⁹⁷

We cannot be absolutely certain what had occurred. It is just possible that the child had died in the womb, but it would seem more likely from the extended 'pregnancy' that Honor had never conceived at all. Unlike Mary Tudor, Honor survived her phantom pregnancy by many years, so it clearly does not indicate a major illness such as uterine cancer. Perhaps she misinterpreted the menopause, but her desire for a child, a Plantagenet heir, combined perhaps with irregular periods, may have led to the physical symptoms of abdominal swelling and amenorrhoea. Given this, it would be hardly surprising if the unfortunate woman became convinced that she had in fact conceived a child.⁹⁸ The excitement of all her friends and family, including Husee, would no doubt only have reinforced her certainty, until the point where she could no longer go on believing it. At some time after this, on the

⁹³ *Letters*, vol. 4 nos. 870a, 870b, 872; vol. 5 no. 1364

⁹⁴ *Letters*, vol. 4 nos. 877, 880, 881

⁹⁵ *Letters*, vol. 4 p. 148, no. 891

⁹⁶ Women did not always know when their babies were due, and some doctors believed that pregnancy could last for ten months or even longer. David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death* (Oxford 1997) p. 43

⁹⁷ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 893

⁹⁸ I am grateful to Mr David Thomas, F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G., for a discussion on phantom pregnancy.

recommendation of her friend Guillaume le Gras, she saw a French physician, Doctor Le Coop. He prescribed her a diet to eradicate the 'cold and slemysh humours' from her body. These humours, if not properly dealt with, could gather in various different part of the body with differing results. One of these was that

it fortuneth some time that they fall and gather together in the mother [womb], where if they fortune to stick fast and congeal together, there engendereth with also the blood that is retained a swelling, even like as the woman had conceived, and it doth move himself neither more nor less than if the child were conformed, which deceiveth and abuseth many folks.⁹⁹

Doctor Le Coop prescribed purging, a 'little drink' to be given her by Mr Philbert the Calais physician, and a fairly light diet, avoiding most meats, pastry, and most fruit and vegetables but permitting poultry including game birds and certain 'hot' herbs. If she should feel the need for any food after supper (which he hoped she would not) she might 'eat a little marmalade for to comfort your stomach, or else a pear well roasted betwixt two ashes, with sugar'. We do not know if she observed the diet, but she continued to consult the physician at least until March 1538.¹

Though Honor and Arthur never had a mutual child, there were already ten children between them (three of his and seven of hers) to occupy them. Much of the *Lisle Letters* concerns the children and their upbringing and activities. In formal and practical terms the two families became one, and the children of both sides addressed Arthur and Honor as 'mother' and 'father', while Lady Lisle was involved with the Plantagenets just as she was with the Bassetts.¹¹ In keeping with their times, the relationship was expressed in formal terms. Young James Basset, Honor's youngest child, began a typical letter to his mother thus

⁹⁹ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 898

¹⁰⁰ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 1067. Pears and marmalade, including quince marmalade, were also recommended for pregnant women. Michael K. Eshleman, 'Diet during Pregnancy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' *Journal of the History of Medicine* 30 (January 1975)

¹⁰¹ This appears to have led to some confusion among scholars, with Alice Friedman referring to 'the . . . sons of Viscount Lisle' and to John as the 'eldest son and heir' saying that he 'could not simply slip comfortably into his inheritance and live the life of a traditional lord'. Friedman's point was that John must have 'the humanist education which was considered necessary for admission into the professional world'. It is more to the point that John was receiving the legal training now considered necessary for a lord of the manor, not a peer as Friedman implies. Alice Friedman, 'The Influence of Humanism on the Education of Girls and Boys in Tudor England', *History of Education Quarterly*, 25 (1985) p. 60

Madame, I recommend me humbly to your good favour, beseeching that I maybe recommended to the good favour of my lord my father, and to my brother John and to all my sisters. ¹⁰²

This very formal salutation from a twelve year old boy to his mother conceals a warm relationship in which Lady Lisle doted on her youngest boy and was not above spoiling him, a situation which James was able to manipulate to his own advantage.

When Lord Lisle was appointed the King's Deputy in Calais in 1533, the family had the problem of what to do with the children. Elizabeth Plantagenet, Lisle's second daughter, probably around 12, was placed in the household of her older stepbrother John Dudley and remained there throughout the period the family was in Calais. Frances, Lisle's eldest daughter, and the two older Basset girls, Philippa and Katherine, all already around 16,¹⁰³ were old enough to go with their parents to Calais and to take part in the social life of the Deputy's household there. To use a Victorian analogy, these three girls were 'out' in society. The younger Basset girls, Anne and Mary, were not 'out' but they too went to Calais. For them Lady Lisle had plans which made Calais a useful point of entry to French society.

That left Bridget, the youngest Plantagenet, and the three Basset boys, all of whom were left behind in England. John, already 15, was due to take up his studies at Lincoln's Inn, as was appropriate for the Basset heir. George, the middle boy, aged perhaps 8 or 9, was placed in Winchester in the care of the Prior of the Abbey of Hyde. His little brother James, only about 6, was sent further afield to Reading, where Hugh Cook was abbot. The Lisles evidently preferred to keep the boys in England at this stage, even if George and James could no doubt have been given tutors in Calais. The final child, Bridget Plantagenet, was like her step-brothers given a monastic guardian, in her case Elizabeth Shelley abbess of St Mary's Abbey Winchester.

John Basset, Honor Lisle's eldest son, and heir to his father Sir John Basset, was 15 when the Lisles moved to Calais. As the heir, John needed a practical rather than a purely academic education, and he was sent therefore to the Inns of Court, .

¹⁰² *Letters*; vol. 5 no. 1417

¹⁰³ Katherine's age is uncertain, her birth may have been in 1517 (in which case she was about 16), but it may have been in 1519/1520 which would make her only about 13.

which even by the fifteenth century had 'provided particularly for the lay nobility concerned with questions of landownership and administrative and judicial matters'.¹⁰⁴ He was equipped with a chamber at Lincoln's Inn,¹⁰⁵ only partly furnished since Lady Lisle was asked to provide hangings and storage coffer, and with a literate, possibly even Latinate, servant-cum-tutor, William Bremelcum.¹⁰⁶ By the time John was nearly nineteen, while his legal education was not yet finished, additional plans were being made for his future. Arthur and Honor Lisle had between them devised a very satisfactory scheme that joined the interests of two of their children. John Basset, it was proposed, should marry Frances Plantagenet. We have no knowledge of the relationship between the young people before their marriage, although there is evidence of affection afterwards, but at least they will have been well acquainted. The question of Frances's status was a problem. She was the daughter of two peers, since her mother had been Baroness Lisle in her own right, and through her mother Frances was kin to other leading noble families. She was also of course of Plantagenet blood. John Basset on the other hand was, though honourable and armigerous, merely a gentleman. For him, it was an excellent match. Husee again was asked to make enquiries. He applied quite properly to the Heralds of Arms who said reassuringly that 'the woman shall never lose no part of her degree, but shall always be taken as her father's daughter'. Husee had also asked Honor's friend Lady Rutland for her opinion, and she was less encouraging, insisting that 'the party must lose her estate, and take the degree of her wedlock'.¹⁰⁷ The Lisles seem to have been guided by the Heralds' opinion, and the wedding went ahead in February 1538 with Husee doing much of the organising from London. He ordered frontlets and bonnets for Mrs Frances, goldsmith's work for a cap for Mr Basset, parcels of silk, a tawny velvet gown. Sir John Dudley agreed to send venison for his half-sister's wedding.¹⁰⁸

Honor Lisle, effectively combining the roles of both bride's mother and bridegroom's mother, was not surprisingly stressed by the occasion. Though Husee had no doubt been given precise instructions, when the goods arrived Lady Lisle was

¹⁰⁴ Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England*, Cambridge (1966/79) p. 9

¹⁰⁵ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 530, vol. 2 no. 303

¹⁰⁶ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 526-527

¹⁰⁷ *Letters* vol. 4 nos. 856, 887

¹⁰⁸ *Letters* vol. 4 nos. 857, 858, 859, 861

not satisfied with the bride's dress. She complained that 'Mistress Frances' sleeves was [sic] not turned up with tinsel, and that her kirtle was not silver'. Husee again defended himself. 'I followed your ladyship's bill of proportion in it, for if your ladyship had written so to have had it, it should not a'lacked.' Despite this rather sour note Husee showed no resentment at his mistress's lack of gratitude, perhaps understanding the stress of the occasion.¹⁰⁹

Frances Plantagenet was already around seventeen when her father went to Calais, and we therefore have no correspondence concerning her education. Frances only emerges as a personality after her marriage to John Basset, which was followed within a few months by pregnancy. John returned to London in August, leaving Frances rather sorry for herself, unwell and missing her new husband. In November 1538 Lady Lisle went to London, and in two letters to her mother-in-law Frances revealed some of her feelings.¹¹⁰ She sent the various items Lady Lisle had wanted, talked about the problems of finishing cushions as required, and almost as a footnote revealed how eager she was to hear from her husband. Ten days later in a second letter, again mainly concerned with mundane matters, she noted that John had now written to her. Her words 'thanking your ladyship that it hath pleased your ladyship to remember me to Master Basset, who hath sent me a letter' suggest that John had received a maternal reminder of his duty.¹¹¹ Frances's baby was born in May, a girl who was named after her grandmother. Husee, while giving his congratulations, expressed conventional regrets that the first child was not a boy.¹¹² We have no record of Lady Lisle's reaction to her namesake's birth, but we do know that the proud grandmother ordered fine clothes for little Honor as soon she was out of swaddling clothes, a 'kirtle of the newest making', three pairs of hose, and 'a little lettice cap'¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 861

¹¹⁰ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1275, 1293

¹¹¹ There is independent confirmation that Frances was suffering from her husband's absence in a letter from John Worth, again written while Lady Lisle was in London, in which he said that both Mistress Frances and Mistress Philippa had been sick of an ague, 'but I think Mistress Frances' ague will soon be past if it were your ladyship's pleasure that Master Basset might come to Calais and see her.'

Letters, vol. 5 no. 1277

¹¹² This may be compared with Thomas More's hope that his daughter Margaret's expected child would be like its mother in everything except sex.

¹¹³ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1553, 1562 Lettice or lettuce was a white or whitish grey

While Frances was enduring the trials of pregnancy, John had resumed his career and entered the Lord Privy Seal's household where he might have had the possibility of an important career in public affairs. There was also the hope that Cromwell would take John's part in the long running dispute with Lord Daubeney over the Beaumont lands.¹¹⁴ None of this was to come to fruition. There had been hints in Husee's letters over the years that John was not strong, and less than a year after he had removed his pregnant wife and child from Calais at the time of Lisle's arrest, John Basset was dead. Frances gave birth to a second, posthumous child who was defiantly named Arthur after his disgraced grandfather.¹¹⁵

George, the second Basset boy, spent about three years at Winchester, working hard at school and being described as 'profiting in his learning.'¹¹⁶ This early period was followed by a spell of tutoring in French and Latin by Jehan des Gardins in St Omer, where his brother James also studied for a time. His master clearly liked the boy, describing George as 'of good conditions and very obedient and diligent' and also 'right discreet for his years' Not surprisingly the hard working child 'profiteth well in his grammar and his reading of French.'¹¹⁷ Knowledge of foreign languages was an increasingly useful skill, and since George, a younger son, would have to make his way in the world such skills were worth cultivating. French in particular was becoming a desirable qualification, as shown by the presence of French tutors in the royal household¹¹⁸ By spring 1538 George had been placed in the household of Sir Francis Bryan With Bryan, George could go to court and observe the great world. George seems to have been an amiable young man. Like Jehan des Gardins, Bryan was impressed with him In early 1540 suggestions began to be made that George should go to Paris Husee wrote that 'Mr Bryan is not very willing to part from Mr George, nor Mr George would not gladly go from him'.¹¹⁹

It is the case of Bridget that most closely conforms to the view that sixteenth century children were treated coldly by their parents. Bridget Plantagenet was born

fur, popular for caps and bonnets, see also *Letters* vol. 1 pp. 627-8

¹¹⁴ See above pp. 112-113

¹¹⁵ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1248; vol. 4 p. 89

¹¹⁶ *Letters*, vol. 3. no. 535

¹¹⁷ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 547, 548

¹¹⁸ Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* (Cambridge 1979 ed.) p. 98

¹¹⁹ *Letters*, vol. 6 no. 1650 (George at court), vol. 6 no. 1654 (Mr Bryan)

about 1526, and Muriel St Clare Byrne suggested that her birth might have been the occasion of her mother's death.¹²⁰ If so, this may account for Arthur Lisle's indifference to his youngest child. Honor no doubt was well meaning, but with so many children of her own to consider, little Bridget was rather low among her priorities. Like her stepbrother George, Bridget stayed in Hampshire, at St Mary's Abbey Winchester which was popular as a girls' school, having 26 young ladies present there at the time of the Dissolution a few years later.¹²¹ In March 1534 Lady Lisle sent Bridget a present of a lettuce fur bonnet,¹²² but with Bridget so far away, her stepmother seems to have forgotten that little girls grow, and also wear out their clothes. After several hints about worn out clothes and various made over garments,¹²³ the abbess grew irritated with the Lisles. Bridget, she wrote 'lacketh convenient apparel, for she hath neither whole gown nor kirtle, but the gown and kirtle that you sent to her last ' The abbess had been obliged to buy four pairs of shoes and three pairs of hose for the child, and complained bitterly that although Bridget had been at Winchester for a year and 33 weeks, she had received only 70 shillings for her board¹²⁴

An old friend, the Lisle receiver-general Sir Anthony Windsor, visited St Mary's in September 1538, five years after Bridget first went to Winchester, and was concerned at what he found. Once again Bridget had 'over-grown' all her clothes. Much more seriously, Windsor wrote to Lisle that Bridget was 'very spare and in need of cherishing'¹²⁵ He insisted on taking her away with him for a holiday, ostensibly to buy new clothes, but writing to Lisle that she would lack nothing 'in learning nor otherwise, that my wife can do for her'. Lady Windsor, it can be assumed, intended to feed the child up and generally mother her for a little while. Abbess Elizabeth, somewhat embarrassed, wrote in her turn to Calais. She explained that she had permitted Bridget to go away with Sir Anthony 'because she was out of

¹²⁰ *Letters*, vol. 1 p. 245

¹²¹ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (London 1994) p. 252. See also Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England*, (Cambridge 1966, 1979) p. 180. Simon states that the popularity of St Mary's as a school gained the monastery a 'brief reprieve' at the Dissolution.

¹²² *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 533

¹²³ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 535, 537

¹²⁴ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 539

¹²⁵ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1224

apparel', but maintained she would not have let the child leave the abbey if she had not expected her to return almost immediately.¹²⁶ Following this however Bridget seems to have remained with the Windsors, so perhaps Lady Lisle's conscience was pricked. On her visit to London in November Lady Lisle sent for Bridget to take her back to Calais.¹²⁷ Lisle seemed unhappy about having Bridget returned to him. In one of his letters to Honor while she was in London, he wrote 'I am sorry that ye wol bryng my dowter brygit with yow'.¹²⁸ Despite Arthur's protest however Lady Lisle did apparently take Bridget to Calais at this time. The only other reference to Bridget in the correspondence is a comment by the Earl of Sussex, which makes it clear that she was still in the household in 1540, but was not considered to have been incriminated in any of the family's 'treasonable' activities.¹²⁹

James, the youngest Basset child, emerges much more clearly from the *Letters* as a personality than most of his siblings, and this allows a fuller impression of Honor Lisle's attitude to her children. When his parent left for Calais, James was sent to Reading Abbey which had a well established school run by Leonard Cox, a humanist scholar who had taught at Cracow, and wrote the first English school textbook of rhetoric.¹ Hugh Cook the abbot of Reading was ultimately to be one of the three abbots executed for resisting the dissolution of their houses, though David Knowles suspected that his real crime was too close an involvement with the Poles.¹³¹ Whatever his political opinions, in 1533 the abbot was clearly charmed by little James Basset. In November, a few months after James went to Reading, the abbot was described as being 'as tender of him and he were the King's son.' The abbot himself wrote to Lady Lisle that her youngest son 'proveth a very towardly child both in learning and other his qualities.' Even at this stage James was showing a propensity for getting his own way. The boy was about 6 at this time, and the abbot decided he was 'too young to shift for himself'. The abbot therefore announced his intention of handing him over to the care of William Edmunds, the abbey under-steward, 'which

¹²⁶ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1226

¹²⁷ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1283

¹²⁸ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1291

¹²⁹ *Letters*, vol. 6 p. 151

¹³⁰ Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* (Cambridge 1979 ed.)

p.93 I am grateful to Prof. Claire Cross for this point.

¹³¹ David Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs* (Abingdon 1976) pp. 260-261

hath an honest wife to see him ordered.' ¹³² It is tempting to see the child, uncomfortable in the relative austerity of the monastery, deciding he would prefer to stay in a more domestic environment with a woman to make a fuss of him, and therefore letting himself appear more babyish than he really was. It is also unlikely that young James will have benefited very much by Leonard Cox's humanist teaching, since the boy was barely literate when he left Reading.

James's more formal education began with an unfortunate start at the College de Calvi in Paris, under the patronage of Guillaume Poyet, President of the Parlement of Paris. Having made the arrangements however the distinguished patron largely ignored his protege, failed to pay the bills, and the child made little academic progress ¹³³ As a result, Lady Lisle took him away from the college and sent him instead to Jehan des Gardins in St Omer (who also tutored George) for some cramming especially in French. ¹³⁴ James was then returned to Paris, this time in the care of the merchant and family friend Guillaume le Gras. Here James himself favoured a proposal to send him to the prestigious College de Navarre, largely because of the useful acquaintances he might make there. ¹³⁵ Lady Lisle, de Gras and John Bekynsaw, another of Lady Lisle's advisors however had doubts about this scheme because of James's problems at the College de Calvi.

James was able to use his manipulative skills to persuade Bekynsaw of the advantages of returning to school, and Bekynsaw in turn persuaded Lady Lisle. ¹³⁶ This was a good examples of James 'twisting his mother round his little finger' and the boy duly went to the College de Navarre. Not long before, Honor had indulged James' dislike of Lenten fish by sending him a special barrel of sprats. ¹³⁷ Despite his

¹³² *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 521, 522, 522a

¹³³ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos 560, 563

¹³⁴ *Letters*, vol 3 no. 569

¹³⁵ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 1052

¹³⁶ *Letters*, vol. 4 no 1053

¹³⁷ Fish of course was compulsory in monastic and similar institutions in Lent and at other times, and James must have suffered at Reading. However he had a taste for sprats. At the Abbey of Westminster in the period 1495-1525, around 570 main dishes of fish were served in a typical year. Of this number 11 dishes were of 'other varieties of fatty fish,' which included salmon and sprats. The great majority of the dishes (484.5) were of various forms of white fish. If this was typical of other abbeys, James is unlikely to have had sprats at Reading very often. See Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England 1100-1540* (Oxford 1993) 48, note to Table II.2

hopes, the College de Navarre however did not come up to James's expectations, and again he appealed to his mother for help. James told Honor a tale of censored letters and sick boys unable to communicate with their parents. The real grievance however was that he was being forced to share a bed with two other boys, one of them a servant.¹³⁸ This would seem to suggest that James was accustomed, unusually, to a bed of his own. Honor was more sceptical about her son's complaints this time and sent Bekynsaw to make enquiries. Bekynsaw was apparently satisfied with the explanations given by the college Rector, Pierre du Val, since he urged Honor 'not to be moved with every word your son shall send you'.¹³⁹ Soon however James left the College de Navarre and returned to le Gras, apparently again because he could not endure the standard Lenten diet of fish. Advice writers warned of the dangers of 'cockering' or spoiling a child, but in the case of James, evidently her favourite, Honor ignored them¹⁴⁰

James's education, more expensive and more difficult than anticipated was now considered to be finished. Since James was intended for the church, service in the household of a great churchman was the next stage. James had already become acquainted with Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, while Gardiner was serving as ambassador in France and it was decided that James should enter his service. Here at last it was likely that the spoiling James had grown accustomed to would stop. Husee, discussing the arrangements made with the bishop, said pointedly that 'I think not the contrary but he shall go without part of his own purpose, so that he shall have what pleaseth my lord and not all things at his own pleasure.'¹⁴¹ James was no longer a pretty babe, and his adult career had begun.

Lady Lisle took advantage of Calais's geographical position and sent her two youngest daughters to noble French households. The two arrangements were probably made together, since Mary Basset's hostess Madame de Bours was the sister of Monsieur de Riou, Anne's host. The families were well-connected, Madame de Bours' husband being a member of the Montmorency family. Honor Lisle clearly hoped that a sojourn in this sort of French household would give her daughters

¹³⁸ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 1062

¹³⁹ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 1064

¹⁴⁰ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 1065

¹⁴¹ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1427

considerable advantages in their future lives. The only real careers available for a woman in 1533 might be marriage or a nunnery, but along the route to a good marriage, for a well connected girl, lay the beguiling possibility of royal service.

The girls were sent away from home, but this should not be taken as evidence of neglect.¹⁴² As soon as Anne arrived at Pont de Remy, Madame de Riou hastened to assure Lady Lisle that she would treat the girl 'as she were my natural daughter'. We have no evidence that Mme de Riou spoke English; her letters were all written in French, and since Anne is unlikely to have spoken much if any French when she went to Pont de Remy she may well have felt homesick. We know she missed her mother - in her first letter Anne expressed her pleasure at the arrival of John Smith the Lisles' servant, because he brought news of Lady Lisle. On the other hand the girl did not hesitate, in what may have been the first letter home she wrote after a six month stay in France, to give her mother a long shopping list of her requirements.¹⁴³ The arrangement seems to have been that Madame de Riou provided Anne's keep, and made occasional purchases for her, but Lady Lisle was expected to clothe her daughter, pay for at least some of the things Mme de Riou bought, and send regular pocket money. Lady Lisle also sent several gifts to the de Rious, hawks and sporting dogs and even a virginals. In return Mme de Riou introduced Anne to her friends. Anne clearly made herself popular with her hostess, who wrote of her approvingly and made her a godmother to her infant daughter.¹⁴⁴

Mary Basset was younger than Anne, and this may be the reason why she stayed a few months longer with her mother. It is possible that Mme de Bours waited for a favourable impression of Anne before finally agreeing to take Mary, for Anne paid a visit to Mme de Bours in June 1534, a few weeks before Mary arrived at the chateau.¹⁴⁵ Mary like her sister pleased her French hostess. In her first letter to Lady Lisle, Mme de Bours praised Mary's 'excellent disposition', and echoing her sister-in-law's words said she loved her as if she were her own daughter.¹⁴⁶ Mme de

¹⁴² It was of course normal for both boys and girls to be sent to other, usually superior, households for a period of 'service'. McCracken, Grant 'The exchange of children in Tudor England: an anthropological phenomenon in historical context' *Journal of Family History* vol. 8 no. 4 (1983)

¹⁴³ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 570, 571

¹⁴⁴ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 581a, p. 155

¹⁴⁵ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 573, dated to 1534 by Byrne as Mary is not mentioned.

¹⁴⁶ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 574

Bours's letters suggest genuine affection for Mary. As with the de Rious, gifts passed between the households, both the usual hawks and greyhounds and more personal things including an exchange of each lady's favourite preserves.¹⁴⁷ Mary also sent gifts to her mother: purses, a needlecase, and a gospel 'to carry with your paternoster'.¹⁴⁸ Mme de Bours for her part arranged that Mary should be presented to Queen Eleanor during a royal visit to Abbeville.¹⁴⁹

Despite the attractions of her stay in France, Mary's letters home showed evidence of affection for her mother. The first of her letters preserved requests Lady Lisle to send news of herself, and in a letter to her sister Philippa, Mary writes:

'I enjoy myself so much here in this country that I should be right content, if that I could often see my lady my mother, never to return to England'.¹⁵⁰

For many months during the period when Mary was in France, Lady Lisle was believed to be expecting a child. Mary refers to this in several letters, one of which presents a delightful image and emphasises that despite their long separation mother and daughter still had a warm relationship.

If I might have my wish I would be with you when you shall be brought to bed, to warm his swaddling clouts for the babe. I have besought all my good friends to pray God for you, and chiefly I have commended you to the good prayers of my schoolmaster when he sayeth his mass.¹⁵¹

Part of the purpose of the girls' sojourn in France was for them to acquire social polish and sophistication, but the girls' lessons were also continued. We know little about Anne's education, though she must have become reasonably fluent in French, since her letters were dictated in that language. Her degree of literacy is difficult to assess, she told her mother later that she could only write her name, but this may mean that in English she could write only her name, though she could write properly in French. In one of her letters to Mme de Bours Lady Lisle gave some thoughts on suitable occupations for Mary, which would no doubt apply equally to Anne. 'I would she should ply her work, the lute and the virginals'.¹⁵² In fact we know rather more about Mary's education than about Anne's. Mary certainly did 'ply

¹⁴⁷ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 574a, 583, 586

¹⁴⁸ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 579, 590

¹⁴⁹ *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 618, 619

¹⁵⁰ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 588

¹⁵¹ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 615

¹⁵² *Letters*, vol. 3 nos. 583a, 588, p. 213-214 (Mary's accounts)

her work', since a bill sent to her mother included scissors, silk thread and canvas.¹⁵³ However she also learnt to speak French (which she could not do on her arrival at the de Bours). It is possible that she learnt to read and write in France, as she told her mother of the schoolmaster 'who taught me to read and write', but this may also mean that the master merely helped her polish those skills.¹⁵⁴

Her sojourn in France, where she had developed a warm relationship with her hostess, did not lead to further advancement for Mary. The Lisles tried to place her in the Lady Elizabeth's household, but she was rejected on the grounds that the King's daughter 'had too much youth about her'.¹⁵⁵ What her family did not realise at this stage was that during her stay in France, Mary had formed a secret but serious romantic attachment to Mme de Bours's son, which was to play a part in the family's downfall

The sophistication which, it was to be hoped, Anne Basset had gained during her three year sojourn at Pont de Remy was not to be wasted. Within days of Jane Seymour becoming queen Lady Lisle had launched on her grand design for her daughter.¹⁵⁶ On Lady Lisle's behalf, Husee began to lobby all those who might help, including Lisle's distinguished cousin, Margaret Countess of Salisbury.¹⁵⁷ He was advised of the desirability of cultivating Lady Beauchamp, wife of the Lisles' old adversary Edward Seymour, and, more relevantly, the queen's sister-in-law though the dispute between them meant that her support was not very likely.¹⁵⁸ Honor's friend Lady Rutland offered to take Anne into her household once the summer with its danger of sickness was past. When she came back to court she promised to 'be in hand with' Lady Beauchamp and others on Anne's behalf. While Husee and Lady Rutland lobbied in London, Lady Lisle sent quantities of gifts and tokens to those who might help her.¹⁵⁹

It is interesting to note here that although Anne was the preferred candidate, Lady Lisle planned to send Katherine to London as well, and it seems as if she did not

¹⁵³ *Letters*, vol. 3 pp. 213-214

¹⁵⁴ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 587

¹⁵⁵ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1453, 1457a

¹⁵⁶ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 717

¹⁵⁷ *Letters*, vol. 4 nos. 850ii, 863. Anne was about 15 or 16 at this time.

¹⁵⁸ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 867

¹⁵⁹ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 875 (Lady Rutland) no. 887 (gifts of quails etc.)

really mind which girl served the queen, as long as one of them did. Honor's methods proved effective. Her many gifts had included quails for the queen, and one Thursday at dinner, while Lady Rutland, and Lady Sussex (Honor Lisle's niece) were in attendance, Jane Seymour 'chanced, eating of the quails, to common of your ladyship and of your daughters'. Jane, it would seem, knew about all the networking Lady Lisle had been doing. Ladies Rutland and Sussex naturally praised the girls, and the pleasing result was that the queen ordered that both the Basset girls should be sent over to London; 'for her Grace will first see them and know their manners and conditions, and take which of them shall like her Grace best.'¹⁶⁰

Husee proceeded to give Lady Lisle some advice about the behaviour of her daughters. He urged that she should:

'exhort them to be sober, sad, wise and discreet and lowly above all things, and to be obedient, and to be governed and ruled by . . . such as be your ladyship's friends here, and to serve God and to be virtuous, for that is much regarded, to serve God well and to be sober of tongue.'

Husee's conventional advice was reinforced with the further comment that she herself should instruct them before they left Calais. 'For your ladyship's words will stick nigh their stomachs'¹⁶¹

Some two months after the fortunate dinner of quails, Husee was able to report the news that Lady Lisle will have been awaiting. 'Your ladyship shall understand that Mrs Anne your daughter was sworn the Queen's maid on Saturday last past '¹⁶² The long process of service and training had been designed to fit her for just this role, and Lady Lisle will surely have known a sense of satisfaction at the fulfilment of her ambition for at least one of her daughters. Alas, the satisfaction was brief. Within days of Anne's swearing in, Queen Jane Seymour took to her chamber and of course she did not long survive the birth of her son. In that brief interim period Anne Basset attended Prince Edward's christening, in a new dress that Husee had hastily ordered for her. But soon young Anne was to ride in the unfortunate Queen's funeral procession, and then, since she could not be the Queen's maid without a Queen to serve, she was without a position.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 887

¹⁶¹ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 887

¹⁶² *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 895

¹⁶³ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 900, vol. 4 p. 180

Until anything more permanent could be arranged, Lady Sussex took Anne Basset into her care, though Honor was sensitive about this, since her niece had earlier refused to house Katherine Basset. Lady Lisle wrote rather crossly saying that she would not have refused her kinswoman's daughter: 'in case ye sent any to me, if they were ij or iij, I would have been glad to accept them and to do for them as mine own'¹⁶⁴

Lady Sussex moved in a rich and fashion conscious society, a fact which led to a dispute between Anne and her mother. Having been briefly lent a decorative pearl head-dress called a past, Anne demanded sufficient pearls to form a head-dress of her own. After apparently expressing doubt whether such an expensive accessory was strictly necessary, Honor gave in to her daughter when Husee wrote that 'there is no remedy but Mrs Anne must have an edge of pearl against Easter'.¹⁶⁵ Anne duly received the pearls, but was not satisfied. There were not enough, and they were 'all rags'¹⁶⁶. Anne at this point forgot the sober, 'sad, wise and discreet' behaviour that had no doubt been inculcated into her by Lady Lisle and Madame de Riou, and lost her temper in front of Lady Lisle's man Thomas Warley. Warley indiscreetly reported Anne's words to her mother verbatim (Husee by contrast did some judicious editing) and a bitter row ensued.¹⁶⁷ It was several weeks before amicable relations between mother and daughter were fully restored. Vives would no doubt have rebuked Honor for spoiling her daughter in the first place (especially over a question of extravagant raiment) but he would have been much sterner with Anne's unmaidenly behaviour.

The arrival of a new queen restored Anne Basset to her position at court. She attracted much attention and was even spoken of as a possible bride for the king himself at one time.¹⁶⁸ Lady Lisle attempted to take advantage of Anne's popularity with the king advising her to further her 'continuance in the king's favour', which

¹⁶⁴ *Letters* vol. 4 no. 904

¹⁶⁵ *Letters* vol. 5 nos. 1102, 1117, 1120, 1125, 1126, 1133

¹⁶⁶ We do not know whether Anne's pearls were real or artificial. Real pearls came from the Persian gulf or more cheaply from Scotland, but artificial pearls were available, made of glass with various coatings, some more effective than others, the best based on 'margarite shell' possibly oyster shell or 'mother of pearl'. I am grateful to Cheryl Thorogood of the Museum of London for information about pearls in the early modern period.

¹⁶⁷ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1136a (Husee), no. 1137 (Warley) and also vol. 5 nos. 1149, 1154 & 1155

¹⁶⁸ *L.P.*, vol. 17 p. 40

would also of course further Lady Lisle's position as well. Anne duly presented jars of quince preserve to the king, but cautioned her mother against pressing too far for a token, 'for fear how his grace would a'takyt it'.¹⁶⁹ Anne's greater, court-refined sophistication, was leading to a subtle alteration in her relationship with her mother.

While Mary and Anne had been to France, Katherine Basset had remained at home in Calais, but Lady Lisle was equally ambitious for her. Though the application to put her with Lady Sussex failed, there were also proposals for Katherine to join the household of the young Duchess of Suffolk. This would have been an excellent situation, but though negotiations were satisfactory the young Duchess stayed away from court, and this proposal petered out.¹⁷⁰ Instead Katherine settled with Lady Rutland where 'she behaveth very well, and is beloved of young and old'.¹⁷¹ Katherine stayed happily with the Rutlands for some time,¹⁷² but eventually she tired of life in the country at Belvoir with Lady Rutland and her young baby, and asked her mother to try to obtain her a post 'that I may be one of the queen's maids'.¹⁷³

Coincidentally the Lisles were entertaining Anne of Cleves and her court at Calais, and Honor or Arthur Lisle approached Dr Henry Olisleger, Vice Chancellor of Cleves, over a possible appointment for Katherine Basset as one of the new Queen's maids. However though Olisleger spoke to the King, and several councillors, he was told that the queen's ladies had already been selected.¹⁷⁴ Anne Basset, having gone through the appointment process with Jane Seymour, was now automatically one of Anne of Cleves' maids, but Katherine could not be considered at least for the present. Lady Rutland suggested to Lady Lisle that she should approach Mother Lowe, the 'Mother of the Maids' who was believed to have great influence. Katherine, not disheartened by her rejection, wrote at the same time to her mother, repeating Lady Rutland's advice and asking Lady Lisle to send a token to Mother Lowe on her

¹⁶⁹ *Letters*, vol. nos. 1558, 1620. 1653

¹⁷⁰ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 895

¹⁷¹ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 906

¹⁷² Lady Lisle was obliged to display possibly uncharacteristic tact to turn down an invitation for her daughter to join the household of Lord and Lady Hertford (the former Edward Seymour and his wife, no longer at odds with the Lisles), since Katherine preferred to stay with Lady Rutland. *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1379, 1396a, 1405, 1432

¹⁷³ *Letters*, vol. 5, no. 1574

¹⁷⁴ *Letters*, vol. 6 no. 1636

behalf.¹⁷⁵ Young as she was Katherine understood the way to achieve one's ends at the court. Anne Basset also spoke to the king on her sister's behalf, but received the discouraging reply that many people had asked on behalf of their friends, and that 'a'would have them that should be fair, and as he thought meet for the room'.¹⁷⁶ We know that Anne and Mary Basset were both considered good looking, but perhaps Katherine was rather plain. Katherine returned to Belvoir with the Rutlands and was still with them when Lisle was arrested.

Far less is found in the *Letters* about the two remaining children, Elizabeth Plantagenet and Philippa Basset, than about the others. As has already been noted, Elizabeth Plantagenet was placed with her half-brother John Dudley, and remained in the Dudley household for the entire period that the Lisles were in Calais. Elizabeth kept in contact with her father through Husee, but she seems to have been at Sir John Dudley's finding. She featured in various marriage negotiations without success, and at one time Dudley believed that Lisle was dividing his property unfairly away from Elizabeth in favour of Frances.¹⁷⁷ The only commendation of Elizabeth's character comes from John Husee who assured her father that she 'is a goodly young gentlewoman and a good'.¹⁷⁸ The experiences of Bridget Plantagenet suggest that Lady Lisle, while hardly a fairy tale 'wicked stepmother' took less interest in her stepchildren than her own natural children. This seems to be confirmed by a brief reference in a long letter of Husee's of 1539 that Lisle would shortly receive a token from Elizabeth 'which saith that she receiveth no token from you'.¹⁷⁹ Evidently Honor Lisle had not recently reminded Arthur of his responsibility towards his absent daughter.

The final child Philippa Basset remained with her mother in Calais, where friends including her half sister Jane Basset sent commendations to her, and she seems to have had a friendly relationship with Mary, who wrote to her twice from France.¹⁸⁰ A possible marriage for Philippa was discussed, involving Clement Philpot, son of Sir Peter, a Hampshire neighbour, but came to nothing. The plan, made by Husee and

¹⁷⁵ *Letters*, vol. 6 nos. 1649, 1650

¹⁷⁶ *Letters*, vol. 6 no. 1653

¹⁷⁷ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1107

¹⁷⁸ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1116

¹⁷⁹ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1593

¹⁸⁰ *Letters*, vol 3 nos. 513, 520 (Jane) *ibid.* nos. 588, 609 (Mary).

Lady Lisle, allowed for the two to be betrothed 'upon liking', which suggest that Philippa and Philpot did not sufficiently like each other.¹⁸¹ However Philpot did enter Lisle's service (another part of the plan) with what were to prove catastrophic results, and it may be considered that she had a fortunate escape.¹⁸² Our lack of knowledge of Philippa is partly because as the daughter at home, there was no need for letters concerning her activities, and also because there seem to have been few plans for her preferment, unlike the other girls. In one letter Husee mentioned, quite casually, 'and when your ladyship shall signify me anything by writing concerning Mrs Philippa or Mrs Mary, I shall be always glad to preferre [sic] all things to the uttermost of my power'.¹⁸³ We know that Philippa had a period of ill health in autumn 1538, because this occurred when Lady Lisle was in England and so her daughter's illness is mentioned several times in letters from Calais. Frances Basset wrote that 'as for my sister Philippa, the ague holdeth her very sore still' while Lord Lisle more bluntly described her treatment and its effects. 'Philippa hath taken Jakes medicine and hath voided marvellously upwards'. Though there were further comments in letters to Lady Lisle she did not mention Philippa's illness in her own letters, suggesting a certain indifference to her daughter.¹⁸⁴

When studying the life of Lady Lisle it becomes evident that despite her high social position, and apparently somewhat interfering nature, she was a woman who lacked social confidence. She needed to know what was said about her, and whether it was favourable. In June 1534 Sir Edward Ryngley responded to her enquiries as to how she was regarded at court. He was able to tell her that 'every man speaketh of you good and true, and there is neither gentleman nor yet gentlewoman in the court almost but they ask how your ladyship doth'. It is be hoped the qualification 'almost' did not disturb her too much. Her insecurity did not abate with the growing length of her stay in Calais. In September 1538 she was still worried though Husee was able to report that his 'privy enquiry' had shown 'the king and other hath reported your ladyship to be of much honour' taking far more pains on her son's behalf than most mothers would have done.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 861, vol. 5 no. 1116

¹⁸² See below pp. 150

¹⁸³ *Letters*, vol. 5, no. 1441

¹⁸⁴ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1275, 1280, 1277, 1293, 1303

¹⁸⁵ *Letters*, vol. 2 nos. 212a, 262; vol. 4 no. 1218

Honor was not simply a neurotic woman fussing about her reputation. She did have grounds for concern. She found it remarkably difficult to get a gentlewoman to come to Calais to be her waiting woman. Various women were found by Husee, seemed suitable, but then slipped through his fingers.¹⁸⁶ Husee revealed the reason for at least some of these women's unwillingness to serve Lady Lisle when he rather unwisely told her that 'report hath been made that your ladyship should be sharp and hasty, and therefore they have refused'. Not giving the lie to the calumny, she immediately demanded to know where he had heard such a thing, and was no doubt even more annoyed to learn that it was at Lady Sussex's.¹⁸⁷

Difficulty in obtaining servants was an irritation, but being disapproved of by Cromwell was a major worry. In some ways the Lisles were on friendly terms with Cromwell. During the King's visit to Calais in autumn 1532, when Arthur and Honor Lisle were part of the royal party, Cromwell gave them supper, and on the same visit lent Arthur £20.¹⁸⁸ During her 'pregnancy' the minister sent her his greetings and good wishes. Yet despite this friendly manner Cromwell was far from happy at the way Lady Lisle involved herself in Calais politics. Soon after his arrival in Calais the new Deputy, having listened to the complaints of Calais and made his own conclusions about the state of the town and what changes were needed, had unwisely made this clear to the minister, leading to a sharp rebuke. Cromwell told Lisle firmly that 'before this time the Town and marches of Calais hath been well maintained, and prospered without any such new devices'. To make matters worse though, not only had Lisle complained, it had been reported to Cromwell that he was too much inclined to listen to his wife. This earned a further rebuke in the same letter:

For although my lady be both honourable and wise, yet in such causes as longeth to your authority her advice and discretion can little prevail; wherefore I pray your lordship to consider the same, and to importune the King's Highness with none other matters than of necessity ye ought to do.¹⁸⁹

Honor did not however abandon her involvement with public affairs; in the following October she wrote to Cromwell on behalf of a man (probably John Whyte) who had

¹⁸⁶ Waas suggests that gentlewomen came to serve Honor and then immediately left her service, so that Husee began to look for a new one as soon as the last one left London for Calais, but this does not seem to be borne out by the correspondence.

Waas, *Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle* p. 238

¹⁸⁷ *Letters*, vol. 5 nos. 1149, 1154

¹⁸⁸ *Letters*, vol. 1 nos. xv, xva

¹⁸⁹ *Letters*, vol. 1 no. 46

killed someone in self defence, been pardoned, but none the less been 'put . . . clearly from his living' by the Abbot of Bruton.¹⁹⁰ Honor's too open involvement in the politics of Calais led to criticism from others besides Cromwell. She was publicly and embarrassingly attacked by Lady Whethill who accused the Lises of taking the 'room of a spear' that Lady Whethill considered should have gone to her son, and appointing Leonard Snowden instead.¹⁹¹ On this occasion Lisle, not perhaps understanding the undercurrents of Calais politics, had listened to the knight porter Sir Thomas Palmer, rather than listening to the Whethills. Honor also continued to be asked to intercede for other suitors with the Deputy, and there is evidence of a feeling that she was far stronger than he was. John Cheriton, the Exeter merchant who was concerned with the Lises' shipping interests, reported a conversation in which another merchant, Antone de Maryne, reported that he could buy Lisle's favour 'with a fair word and a present of a penny' no matter how much he had offended him 'so that my lady were not in the way'.¹⁹²

Others no doubt felt the same way, which may be why malicious tongues wagged about her. In October 1534 she wrote to William Popley, Cromwell's confidential clerk, saying that she had heard that his master had been told she 'intermeddled' in Lisle's business, and wanting to know who was responsible for the story. Popley soothed her, though he mentioned 'some slender occasion of some insolent persons'.¹⁹³ Some weeks later Cromwell himself wrote Honor a short note, acknowledging that he was reported to be displeased with her. He promised her his friendship, though with the reservation that 'your good ladyship using yourself in all causes none otherwise than I hear that ye do, and as I doubt not that ye will hereafter continue'.¹⁹⁴ That 'as I doubt not' from Cromwell sounds like a threat, if a gracious one.

Mishandling of internal Calais politics was unfortunate and damaging, but worse was to come. Lady Lisle, like so many others, was caught up in religious

¹⁹⁰ *Letters*, vol. 1 no. 57

¹⁹¹ *Letters*, vol. 3 no. 608a

¹⁹² *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 282

¹⁹³ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 268 The same point was pursued in a letter from Leonard Smith in early November, who again reassured her, but warned her about trusting Calais men too easily. *Letters* vol. 2 no. 284

¹⁹⁴ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 286 (20th November 1534)

changes which she did not understand or sympathise with. We know that Lady Lisle was a conventional Catholic with a liking for traditional ceremonial, encapsulated in the image of her carrying a fine illuminated gospel to go with her rosary, perhaps the gold beads she had been given by Anne Boleyn. It was her bad luck to be exposed in a conspicuous position at a time when such traditional religious views and practices, though shared by the majority of people, were coming under criticism from influential quarters. Certainly the early indications of her religious activity are entirely conventional, such as placing three of the Basset children in monastic care when the Lisles went to Calais.¹⁹⁵ Clerics were among those asking for her patronage. John Ruge, an Exeter priest, wrote three times to Lady Lisle asking her for a benefice, saying 'I know well ye have many'.¹⁹⁶

By 1535 the shadow of the religious changes in England was affecting Calais, though the Lisles' distance from the centre of events perhaps meant they did not entirely understand their significance. Some of Cranmer's household had accused Lisle of being a papist, which he strenuously denied (showing incidentally that he was well aware of the danger of that accusation). Cranmer in reply explained why the Pope was condemned, in terms which suggest a sermon or a standard answer, pointing out that the Pope was the 'adversary unto the word of God.' He accepted that while some had 'partly suspected you to have favoured this his said usurped power by ignorance' in fact 'both you, of your gentle nature, and the great towardness of that your good lady, be so inclined to promote the word of God' that he would make a point of defending them. There is a threat of danger; why else should the Lisles need to be defended 'to the King's Highness and his most honourable council as to other'?¹⁹⁷ Despite the Archbishop's assurance that Lisle's good lady was inclined to promote the word of God, others were less sure. In a conversation of March 1538 with Husee, Cromwell moved from talking about confiscated relics to asking directly what Lady Lisle's views were. Husee reassured him that she was 'nothing so scrupulous as it hath been reported', and Cromwell agreed that 'there was no doubt

¹⁹⁵ Even young Gregory Cromwell had been placed with nuns at Little Marlow at one early point in his education. Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* (Cambridge 1966/79) 180

¹⁹⁶ *Letters*, vol. 1 no. 56; vol. 2 nos. 164, 180

¹⁹⁷ *Letters*, vol. 2 no. 376

but she would be won a'little and a'little'. Clearly Cromwell was in fact very doubtful about Lady Lisle's religious views, and not entirely satisfied by Husee's assurances.¹⁹⁸

Husee himself was worried, and tried to persuade his lady of the need to conform to the new ways. He warned her to 'conform yourself partly to the thing that is used and to the world as it goeth now, which is undoubtedly marked above all other things.' More specifically he urged her to abandon the use of long prayers and the offering of candles. Making clear what one of the problems was, Husee (who had previously begged her not to be angry at his advice) told her 'at some time to refrain and not speak, though your ladyship have cause, when you hear things that liketh you not'. If she did this it would cause less comment.¹⁹⁹ There was certainly unfriendly talk about her, probably from 'some of that same town, of your neighbours', and if this criticism had reached Husee in London it was dangerous for Husee's mistress. He reminded her of the observances which were to be continued, a point which again emphasises the way Calais was to some extent out of the mainstream. If Honor had been in London or even in Hampshire it might not have been necessary to remind her that she should have 'only mass, matins and evensong of the day' and omit 'your memories', meaning the regular prayers for the dead.²⁰⁰

Honor's lack of discretion in religious matters, and her continued interference, is shown by her interceding on behalf of two Calais priests William Minstrelsey and Sir William Richardson, who were accused of breaking the new religious laws by the reforming Calais Commissary John Butler. Honor had appealed to Cranmer's chaplain, Mr Hore, on Richardson's behalf.²⁰¹ Moreover the Calais Council seemed to be dragging its feet in taking action against the priests, and Cromwell sternly rebuked the Council's apparent support for 'papistical fashion' with a warning that anyone who offended the King by such behaviour would be removed from office and replaced by others 'by whom he will be better served'. Cromwell commented that he could not believe that the Council would allow itself to be swayed by 'the prayers of women and their fond flickerings', surely a reference to Lady Lisle, most important woman in Calais.²⁰² Even in business matters the Lisles worked closely together, sometimes

¹⁹⁸ *Letters*, vol. 5, no. 1124

¹⁹⁹ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1120

²⁰⁰ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1131

²⁰¹ *Letters*, vol. 4 nos. 891, 892

²⁰² *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 980

apparently sitting alongside each other, as on the occasion when Lord Lisle mistakenly opened a letter from Cromwell to Lord Sandys, and it was Lady Lisle who noticed the mistake.²⁰³ It is unlikely therefore that Lisle did not pass on the Lord Privy Seal's concerns to his wife, and her continued intervention is the more surprising. However, she survived this incident unscathed (unlike the priests), and Cromwell assured Lisle that his criticism of the council was not meant personally and he was still his 'perfect and sincere friend'.²⁰⁴

Despite these warnings Lady Lisle seems to have failed to understand the need to conform to the new ways at least outwardly. Cranmer in September 1537 had received a report that 'your ladyship was given to be a little papisch [sic]' and urged her to be a favourer of the truth.²⁰⁵ It was her traditional position which led to the most damning condemnation of Honor Lisle, both in the words used and in the fact that it was in a form where it was preserved for future generations. John Foxe the martyrologist included a brief account of the Lisles when discussing the case of the reformist preacher Adam Damply. Lord Lisle, 'himself of a gentle nature' was:

fiercely set on, and incessantly enticed by the wicked Lady Honor his wife, who was an utter enemy to God's honour, and in idolatry, hypocrisy and pride, incomparably evil.²⁰⁶

At the time he wrote those harsh words Foxe admitted that he did not know whether Honor Lisle still lived, but he begged that in that case God might yet give her grace to repent.

The case of Adam Damply which Foxe described, played its part in the confused chain of events which led to Lord Lisle's fall. Briefly, Damply, 'a young priest, an Englishman come out of Germany' arrived in Calais and preached enthusiastically but against the official teaching on the sacrament. He was well received by many of the people, who crowded out his sermons. Predictably this stirred up trouble; 'divers people say they care not for the mass and wish they had

²⁰³ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 999

²⁰⁴ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 987 The priests were executed in Calais in 1540, see *ibid.* p. 158

²⁰⁵ *Letters*, vol. 4 no. 1016

²⁰⁶ John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments* . . . ed. G. Townsend and S. R. Cattle (London 1838) vol. 5, 505

never heard mass in their lives'.²⁰⁷ Some, such as the Commissary Butler, supported Damplip and considered he had been vilified. Other like Prior Dove of the Grey Friars fiercely opposed him, perhaps because of Damplip's exposure of a fraudulent relic. The religious troubles in Calais led to Damplip being summoned to London for questioning.²⁰⁸ The Damplip affair in itself is mainly illustrative of the confusion over religion at this time, before the Act of Six Articles reimposed religious orthodoxy. Its importance for Lisle's fall though is that the government responded to the religious troubles by the appointment of the Calais Commission of 1540.

Following demands from Lisle for a more determined policy against religious dissent, largely ignored by Cromwell, the Deputy may have made further complaints to Norfolk on the Duke's brief visit to Calais during his embassy to France in February 1540. According to Byrne, Lisle was not overtly acting in opposition to Cromwell, but was using Norfolk in 'a final desperate bid for the official support necessary to maintain his own authority'.²⁰⁹ Within a few days of Norfolk's return to London the Commission had been appointed to look into Lisle's complaints. The Commissioners, led by Honor Lisle's kinsman the Earl of Sussex, arrived in Calais on March 16th 1540, with instructions to find the parties responsible for the recent troubles, to make suitable laws to deal with any similar future problems, and generally to examine the state of Calais. The Commission first reported to the King on the 5th of April, vindicating Lisle and accusing the sacramentaries, many identified by name. Having received various reports, the King decided to summon Lisle to London 'both to visit us and also to declare his mind and opinion in some things used in that our said town and marches, meet to be both revealed and reformed'.²¹⁰ Warning bells should perhaps have sounded, but did not. Lisle even hoped he might receive an earldom as a result of this visit.

Meanwhile however a quite unconnected trouble had arisen, from within the Lord Deputy's own household. A conservative priest, Gregory Botolf, had made himself popular with both the Lord and the Lady Deputy (he was nicknamed Gregory

²⁰⁷ *Letters*, vol. 5 no. 1178

²⁰⁸ After persuading Cranmer that he was not a heretic, Damplip disappeared for a time, though he was condemned later on a charge of treason ironically resulting from his taking money from Cardinal Pole to help finance his journey to Calais.

²⁰⁹ *Letters*, vol. 6 p. 45

²¹⁰ *Letters*, vol. 6 no. 1672

Sweetlips). He had also become very friendly with a young member of the retinue, Clement Philpot, son of a friend of the Lises and briefly considered as a possible husband for Philippa Basset. Botolf conceived a crazy plan to capture Calais on behalf of the Pope and Cardinal Pole, and drew the gullible Philpot and some other members of the household into his scheme. With Philpot's help Botolf left Calais for several weeks, and on his return claimed to have been to Rome, where, he said, the Pope and Pole sanctioned his scheme. Botolf, having obtained a signed pass from Lisle, then took himself off into Flanders. After some days Philpot seems to have decided the situation was potentially too dangerous, and he revealed what he knew. Questioning began, and rumour spread, including a rumour suggesting that Lady Lisle, that well known religious conservative, was actually giving Botolf financial support.

The Botolf conspiracy was revealed shortly before he left Calais, but Lord Lisle was initially well received in London. On the 19th May, however, Lisle was suddenly arrested and taken to the Tower. According to Marillac, the French ambassador, this was because 'he is accused of having secret intelligence with the Cardinal Pole who is his near relative, and of other secret practices to deliver up to him the town of Calais'.²¹¹ The connection with the Botolf conspiracy, based in Lisle's own household, is obvious.

Meanwhile Lady Lisle was inadvertently playing her own part in the family's downfall. During her stay with the de Bours family, young Mary Basset had developed a close relationship with the son of the house, Gabriel de Montmorency. After her return to Calais she had occasionally corresponded with him, and they had exchanged gifts, with the knowledge of their parents. What the parents did not at first realise was the strength of this friendship. On Palm Sunday eve, Montmorency making his second visit to Calais in a few weeks 'moved her [Mary] earnestly for marriage', and the pair made a private contract, perhaps the binding contract *per verba de praesenti*. Mary did not immediately tell her mother about this because, she claimed, 'she was young and might have time thereunto after.' Shortly after Lisle had gone to London, a formal application for Mary's hand came from the de Bours family. Honor treated this with strict correctness, saying that she could 'say nothing therein

²¹¹ quoted in *Letters*, vol. 6 p. 118

till my lord her husband came home', and writing to both Lord Lisle and the Council in Calais to inform them of the proposal. Lady Lisle was evidently aware of the seriousness of contracting a marriage with a Frenchman without the King's permission.²¹²

At this point none of the women knew that Lisle would shortly be arrested. The interrogations of Lady Lisle and her household that followed included questions about the marriage proposal, (relatively innocuous in itself) but the women caused trouble for themselves by ambiguous and incriminating statements. Mary at first did not admit to the secret betrothal, going no further than to acknowledge talk of marriage. Lady Lisle claimed no knowledge of anything other than the formal proposal. Both Philippa Basset and Mary Hussey (Lady Lisle's gentlewoman) admitted to destroying letters in the jakes, which was taken as an admission of guilt. In a second examination, Mary made things worse by admitting there had been a private marriage contract between herself and Montmorency, and that she had afterwards told her mother and sisters about it.²¹³ By now the position of the Lisle women was very serious: they had destroyed possible evidence (and destroyed letters were always assumed to be incriminating), Mary had made a marriage contract with a Frenchman, an offence in itself, and Lady Lisle had concealed her knowledge of the facts. It is hardly surprising that Mary and Philippa Basset, and Lady Lisle herself, were taken into custody.

Honor was taken into the household of Francis Hall with a gentlewoman (probably Mary Hussey) a priest, a chamberer and a groom. The Privy Council allowed for 'Lady Lisle, one priest and three persons' when agreeing the rate at which Francis Hall should be paid. He was allowed 26s 8d a week for the five people, but was paid many weeks in arrears.²¹⁴ Meanwhile the Lord Deputy's household was broken up. The servants were paid off, and an inventory was taken of the Lisles' possessions.²¹⁵ Mary and Philippa were taken into custody separately and apart from their mother so that they would not collude, Frances and John Basset were allowed to

²¹² *Letters*, vol. 6 pp. 142-144

²¹³ *Letters*, vol. 6 pp. 142-147

²¹⁴ *L. P.* vol. 16 pp. 152, 222-3; *Letters* vol. 6 p. 152

²¹⁵ From the inventory we learn that Lady Lisle had been able to take with her to Francis Hall's house only one cloak and gown, two kirtles and two nightgowns. *Letters* vol. 6 p. 199. The full inventory is vol. 6 pp. 189-210

go back to London, and the Earl of Sussex inquired what should be done about young Bridget Plantagenet.²¹⁶

According to Foxe, writing some time after the event, Honor 'fell distraught of mind' immediately after Lisle's arrest. There is some confirmation of this in the Welsh chronicler of Calais, Elis Gryffudd, though he suggests she 'lost her senses in the house of Francis Hall'. Since her deposition about Mary Basset's betrothal gives no impression of a disturbed mind, it would seem that Gruffudd is the more accurate, though he may only be reporting Calais rumour. Certainly a minor breakdown would have seemed justified, and we have already seen that Lady Lisle could be neurotic at times. The evidence would not though seem to justify the long continuing insanity which Foxe implies in his comment that she 'continued [distraught] many years after'.²¹⁷ There is no suggestion anywhere that provision was made for the administration of her affairs²¹⁸

Arthur Lisle remained imprisoned for almost two years. While he was in the Tower the political landscape changed dramatically, with the fall of ministers and queens while Lisle, in the Tower, seems to have been half-forgotten. In January 1542 however Marillac reported that Lisle's Garter had been sent back to him and he had freedom of movement within the Tower. The ambassador thought he was likely to have his pardon. The King did not hurry; Lisle had to wait until the beginning of March, when the King sent him a token of his pardon. The shock was too much for the old man, and he died in the night, before he could leave the Tower.²¹⁹

Honor Lisle was now again a widow. Within days of Arthur's death she was freed, and sent £100 to pay her debts and cover her costs. Her daughters were also freed, and it may perhaps be guessed that mingled with their rejoicing at their freedom, they mourned for Arthur. Despite Arthur's disgrace though two of the children were able to continue with the careers for which Honor Lisle had struggled. Anne Basset remained in royal service (special provision was made for her at

²¹⁶ *Letters*, vol. 6 p. 151; John Gough Nicholls, ed, *The Chronicle of Calais* The Camden Society vol. 35 (London 1846)

²¹⁷ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* . . . vol. 5 pp. 515-516

²¹⁸ Muriel St Clare Byrne, *The Lisle Letters*, selected and annotated by Bridget Boland (Harmondsworth 1985) p. 504

²¹⁹ *L. P.* vol. 17 pp. 16, 68

Katherine Howard's fall because of her family's problems²²⁰) and having become one of Mary Tudor's ladies she was was honoured by the queen's presence at her wedding to Walter Hungerford in 1554. James Basset also served Queen Mary as one of the gentlemen of her privy chamber,²²¹ after serving Bishop Gardiner loyally from the age of twelve. James retained links with his family, having the wardship of his brother John's postumous son Arthur, and mentioning his surviving sisters in his will of 1558. James remained loyal to traditional religion, and married Mary Roper, daughter of Margaret and William Roper, and of course granddaughter of Sir Thomas More. Mary was herself classically educated, raising the possibility of interesting speculation about her relationship with her mother-in-law. Apart from Anne and James however the other children no longer aspired to greatness, the daughters making respectable but not spectacular marriages, while George Basset settled down as a country gentleman at Tehidy, serving as M.P. for Launceston in 1563 and 1572.

Honor lived on until 1566, spending her last years back at Tehidy with her son George. We know very little of this period in her life, but in 1546 and 1547 she made two transfers of land within the manor of Frithelstock (granted to Lisle after the Dissolution) which would tend to support the view that she had recovered from her breakdown.²²² What Honor no doubt considered Cromwell's sharp practice over Painswick still rankled, and in 1556 she took Sir Anthony Kingston to the court of Chancery for compensation for unpaid dues, winning an annuity of £120 from the estate.²²³ She also appointed to the benefice of Camborne in 1563. In 1558 her grandson Arthur conveyed her a life interest in Tehidy, with the reversion to George Basset, and it was at Tehidy that she died. Honor, Viscountess Lisle, was buried at Illogan Church on 30th April 1566.²²⁴

²²⁰ P.R.O. S.P.1.167/143v

²²¹ This brought considerable rewards. See *Calendar of Patent Rolls Philip and Mary*, vol. 2 p.48, vol. 3 pp.122, 403, vol. 4 p. 200

²²² *L.P.* vol. 21 ii pp. 347, 421

²²³ *Chancery Decree Rolls 36 Henry VIII - 5 & 6 Philip & Mary* (List & Index Society vol. 160, London 1979) p. 69 [P.R.O. C78/9/16]

²²⁴ *Letters*, vol. 6 p. 258

Chapter Five

Jane, Viscountess Rochford: 'that bawde the ladye Jane Rocheford'

Jane, Viscountess Rochford, had the dubious distinction of being one of the small number of women to meet their deaths on the block. She was also one of the few women to be individually excoriated by Act of Parliament. Her life was both more dramatic and more tragic than the other women considered in this study. Because of this the harsh light of contemporary publicity illumined the last acts of that life, and we have at least one first hand account of her death, as well as other accounts at second hand. These make it clear that at least in one man's eyes, the manner of her death made expiation for the sins of her life.¹

Lady Rochford was aristocratic by birth and marriage, connected with the ambitious Howard clan, and she played a role at court from an early age. Her life was in fact lived largely at court or in close proximity to the court and courtiers, and exhibits a traditional way in which court service was open to women. Her Howard kinswomen, Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard, both became queens, and she was closely involved with both Anne Boleyn was her sister in law as well as cousin, and Jane Rochford may have been involved in Anne's downfall. The fall of Katherine Howard led directly to Jane's own execution, though to a modern view she may seem to have been more foolish than wicked. Folly of this kind was not something to be forgiven by King Henry VIII, and to some extent Lady Rochford seems to have been cast as the scapegoat of the Howards

Lady Rochford was born Jane Parker, daughter of Henry Parker, Lord Morley Lord Morley was the son of Alice Lovel, sister and heiress of Henry Lovel, Lord Morley. Her first husband (Jane's grandfather) was Sir William Parker,² but after his death Alice married Sir Edward Howard, son of the second Duke of Norfolk,

¹ P R.O. S P. 1/169 f.32

² Henry Lovel's marriage to Elizabeth de la Pole (daughter of John Duke of Suffolk and niece of Edward IV) having proved childless, his sister Alice succeeded to his lands but not his title. Her first husband Parker, described by G.E.C. as of unknown origin, was a follower of Richard III and his standard bearer at Bosworth. He survived the battle, but took no further part in public life, and was stricken with insanity in 1493 and 1502. M.K.Jones and M.G.Underwood, *The King's Mother* (Cambridge 1992) p. 114

and began the family's connection with the Howards.³ Perhaps surprisingly in view of his White Rose connections, young Henry Parker entered the household of Lady Margaret Beaufort.⁴ There seems to have been a mutual affection between mistress and servant. In his old age he wrote a memoir of the Lady Margaret for the benefit of Queen Mary Tudor, and more importantly she approved his marriage to her kinswoman, Alice St John of Bletsoe.⁵

His position in Lady Margaret Beaufort's household brought Henry Parker to the notice of King Henry VIII. In 1516 he was a gentleman in ordinary to the King, and by 1520 the family title had been revived for him. It was as Lord Morley that he attended the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and in 1522 he was one of those sent to meet Charles V on his visit to England.⁶ His main seat was at Great Hallingbury in Essex, though he did not become a member of the commission of the peace for that county until 1530.⁷ Lord Morley was a scholar, writing a translation of the Triumphs of Petrarch as well as an 'Exposition of Psalm 94' to suit the anti-papal mood of the time which he presented to the King as a New Year's gift in 1539.⁸ Finally in old age, not long before his death in 1555, he wrote his affectionate memoir of Lady Margaret Beaufort. This could be seen as currying favour with Queen Mary, and Morley has been described as showing 'servile friendship' for those in power.⁹ In religion he was something of a trimmer, for or against Rome as appropriate, though perhaps conservative at heart.¹⁰ He does seem to have shown genuine support for princess Mary when it was not entirely in his interest to do so, though he was sufficiently in favour to carry the child Elizabeth at Prince Edward's baptism.¹¹ Lord Morley's

³ 'G E C.' (Cockayne) *Complete Peerage* ed. Vicary Gibbs (1910-1940) vol. 9, pp 220-223

⁴ By circa 1491 he was described as a sewer, and he served as the old Lady's cupbearer at the coronation of her grandson Henry VIII in 1509.

⁵ Jones and Underwood, *op. cit.* pp. 114, 280; see also *loc. cit.* genealogical table 2. Morley's age is uncertain. G E.C. says he was 'at least 33' in 1519. If he was acting as a sewer in 1491 (which suggests an age of at least ten or twelve) he would have been more like 40 by 1519.

⁶ G.E.C. *Peerage* vol. 9 p. 220-223

⁷ S.Gunn, 'Henry Bouchier, Earl of Essex' in G.W. Bernard, ed, *The Tudor Nobility* (Manchester 1992) p. 154

⁸ G.E.C.*op. cit.* vol. 9, pp. 220-223

⁹ Gunn, *op.cit.* p.154

¹⁰ Gunn, *loc. cit.*

¹¹ G.E.C. *Peerage* vol. 9, pp. 220-223

marriage to Alice St. John produced at least three children, Henry the heir, and two daughters Margaret and Jane. Margaret married Sir John Shelton the younger, son of Sir Thomas Boleyn's sister, thus making the first link between the two families and reinforcing the Howard connections, though both Lady Alice and Sir Edward Howard were dead by 1518.¹²

The first reference we have to Jane Parker seems to be on the 1st March 1522 at a court pageant of the assault on the Chateau Vert. In an elaborately staged mock battle a group of ladies representing the female virtues were rescued by the male virtues (led by the king) from the female vices, with the proceedings ending in a dance. The ladies were led by Mary the French Queen as Beauty and the Countess of Devonshire as Honour. The Boleyn sisters Anne and Mary played Perseverance and Kindness, while their kinswoman Jane Parker played Constancy. The ladies were dressed in white satin, from the King's store but freshly trimmed with the names of their characters worked in yellow satin over the garment. The purpose of the event, which cost over £20, was to honour the imperial ambassadors, but its main significance to us is that it marks Anne Boleyn's court debut, shared by the woman who was to become her sister in law.¹³

As Anne Boleyn was beginning to attract attention at court, so her brother George was also making his mark. As a child he served as a royal page,¹⁴ in 1522 he received a grant of offices in Tunbridge jointly with his father,¹⁵ and two years later received the grant of the manor of Grymston in Norfolk.¹⁶ By 1526 George Boleyn had married Jane Parker, thus further consolidating the links between Parker and Boleyn/Howard families.

Whether the marriage began happily we cannot say. The young couple would presumably have been acquainted before the marriage, and it is unreasonable to jump to conclusions because their relationship may have been bad by 1536. Jane had no living children and there is no indication of any pregnancies at all, but this in itself is not sufficient evidence to say that their marriage was unhappy. It has been claimed

¹² Retha Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* (Cambridge 1989) p. 46

¹³ *L.P.* vol. 3 ii p.1559; Eric Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (Oxford 1986) pp. 47-49

¹⁴ Ives, *op. cit.* p.16

¹⁵ Warnicke, *op.cit.* p. 46

¹⁶ *L.P.* vol.4i no. 546: i

that George Boleyn was homosexual.¹⁷ This would be likely to have had a damaging effect on Jane's marital happiness, but it is surprising that Jane had not separated from her husband if this was the case.¹⁸ The verses which Cavendish put into George Boleyn's mouth at his execution suggest considerable and unpleasant licentiousness but imply that all his targets were women.¹⁹ The 'double standard' might require a wife to put up with her husband's infidelity but there were perhaps limits to what a wife might be expected to tolerate.²⁰ The few hints that appear about the relations between Jane and George Boleyn before 1536 do not suggest anything out of the ordinary. When Jane Parker and George Boleyn were married, George was a courtier, son of a courtier and former ambassador, a connection of the powerful Howard family, but no more than that. In fact his marriage to Jane, daughter of Lord Morley, descendant of the Lovel family, and distantly connected to the Tudors, might be seen as bringing social advantage to George. Soon though the situation changed. George's sister Mary had been briefly the King's mistress, but this had made little difference to the Boleyn family. When the King's desire became set on Anne Boleyn, however, the rest of the Boleyns benefited as well. In 1525 Sir Thomas Boleyn had been made Lord Rochford, but in late 1529, shortly after the fall of Wolsey, he became Earl of Wiltshire and Ormonde. Thomas Boleyn's mother had been a Butler heiress, but the title had gone to another branch of the family. The recognition that Boleyn was the Ormonde heir was one sign of royal favour. The earldom of Wiltshire, previously a title of the Stafford family was another, perhaps greater sign. When Thomas Boleyn became earl, George Boleyn took on the lesser title of Viscount Rochford, and Jane acquired the title by which she was known for the rest of her life.²¹ There had

¹⁷ Retha Warnicke, *Anne Boleyn*.215ff; Warnicke, 'Sexual Heresy at the court of Henry VIII' *Historical Journal* vol.30, no. 2 (1987) pp. 247-268

¹⁸ Separations were possible in aristocratic circles, some informal such as that of the Earl and Countess of Northumberland (see the chapter on Mary Northumberland, below), some formal, such as that of William Parr and his wife Anne Bouchier. For Parr, see Susan E. James, 'A Tudor divorce: the marital history of William Parr, Marquess of Northampton', *Trans of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiq. and Arch. Soc.* 90. (1990) pp. 199-204

¹⁹ George Cavendish, *Metrical Visions*, (included in Singer's edition of the *Life of Wolsey*) (London 1827) p. 22; Warnicke, *op. cit.* pp. 215-6

²⁰ Keith Thomas, 'The double standard', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 20 (1959) pp. 195-216

²¹ Ives, *Anne Boleyn* pp. 152-3

already been other marks of royal favour. In autumn 1528 George Boleyn had been given an annuity of 50 marks, and been made keeper of the palace of Beaulieu (Newhall) in Essex.²² By 1530 the Spanish ambassador Chapuys was noting an 'exceedingly courteous' reception from 'the brother of the Lady'. This suggests both George's increasing importance, and his awareness of the need to placate one who was to be Anne's lifelong enemy.²³

There are a very few references to Lady Rochford over the period before Anne Boleyn finally married the King. At the New Year of 1532 she presented the King with four fine caps, and was duly rewarded with the standard gift of gold plate. Lady Rochford was to show a fondness for gifts of rich garments, since in 1534 she presented the King with a fine shirt with a collar of silver embroidery.²⁴ By 1534 of course Lady Rochford was sister in law to a queen, but even in 1532 the increasing importance of Anne Boleyn was reflected in Jane Rochford's life.

In October 1532 King Henry took Anne, newly created Marquess of Pembroke, with him to Calais to meet King Francis I. Anne was given virtually royal honours on this visit and was attended by a group of ladies as if she were already the queen. Most of the ladies however were members of her Howard kin. These included 'Lady Mary', presumed to be Anne's sister Mary Carey, Lady Fitzwalter, a sister of the Duke of Norfolk, and Lady Rochford.²⁵ In a scene reminiscent of the Chateau Vert of ten years earlier, the 'gorgeously apparelled' ladies performed a masque. The King watched the masked ladies for a little while until growing impatient he snatched off the masks to reveal their identities.²⁶ The visit to Calais is believed by many historians to mark a turning point in the relationship of Henry and Anne, the occasion when that relationship was at last consummated.²⁷

Whether or not this was so, by the end of 1532 Anne was pregnant, and the couple were secretly married in late January 1533. Cranmer rushed through the divorce process in his own court at Dunstable and declared the Boleyn marriage legal

²² *L.P.* vol. 4i no. 4993:15; vol. 4ii no. 4779

²³ *Cal. S.P. Span.* vol. 4i 1529-1530 pp.460-71

²⁴ *L.P.* vol. 5 no. 686 (1532); Ives, *op. cit.* p. 259 (1534)

²⁵ Lady Lisle (not yet the 'Lady Deputy' of Calais), who was a client of Anne's, was also present.

²⁶ Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, pp. 200-201; M. St Clare Byrne, *The Lisle Letters* (Chicago 1981), vol. 1 p.251; *L.P.* vol. 5 no 1484

²⁷ E.g. Ives, *op. cit.* p. 202; John Guy, *Tudor England*, (Oxford 1990) p.132

in May, while Parliament carried out the legislative process beginning with the Act of Appeals that prevented Catherine of Aragon getting redress from Rome, and led over the next months to the establishment of the royal supremacy.

It would seem likely that at least during the early part of her marriage to the King, Anne Boleyn remained on good terms with her sister in law. Chapuys reported an incident which supports this view in October 1534. According to the ambassador, Henry was showing too much interest in an unnamed young lady. The jealous queen colluded with Lady Rochford to stir up trouble over the lady so that she would have to withdraw from court. The plot misfired and Lady Rochford was banned from court instead.²⁸ Two months later Chapuys repeated that 'it is true that Rochford's wife was sent from court for the reason that I have heretofore written', suggesting that some doubt had been expressed about this. This might imply doubt because the two women were not previously known to be friends, or doubt may have been expressed about the state of the King's marriage.²⁹

There seems to be no other evidence to give a firm statement about the relationship between Anne Boleyn and Jane Rochford at this time, but there are suggestions that it was far from friendly by the summer of 1535. While the court was away in Hampshire a group of court ladies joined city women in a demonstration at Greenwich in favour of the Princess Mary.³⁰ Not surprisingly the ringleaders of the group found themselves in the Tower. The Bishop of Tarbes reported this incident to the French court, suggesting that it illustrated the popularity of the old queen and the princess, and the unpopularity of Anne Boleyn. From our point of view the interest of this curious incident is that Lady Rochford's name has been suggested as one of the demonstrators who were imprisoned, together with her kinswoman Lady William Howard. It has to be said that the evidence for this is not convincing, being dependent on a marginal note on the Bishop of Tarbes' despatch naming 'Millor de Rochesfort et millor de Guillaume'. Though the presence of Lady Rochford and Lady William

²⁸ *L.P.* vol. 7 p. 1257 ; *Cal S.P. Span.* vol. 5 i 1534-5 pp. 279-80. See also Ives, *Anne Boleyn* pp. 242-3

²⁹ *L.P.* vol. 7 no. 1554

³⁰ For other examples of demonstrations by women, and comment on women's collective action in this period, see R.A. Houlbrooke, 'Women's social life and common action in England from the fifteenth century to the eve of the civil war' *Continuity and Change* 1 (2) (1986) pp. 171-189

Howard has been accepted by both Friedmann and Ives, it would not seem to have been proved incontrovertibly by this despatch alone.³¹ If it is true that Jane Rochford demonstrated against her sister in law, and even endured a period of confinement in the Tower because of it, it is clear that by late 1535 Jane had adopted a position of hostility to Anne Boleyn. Friedmann, querying her change of heart, suggested the influence of Lady William Howard may have been a cause, as may Jane's temporary absence from court. Another cause Friedmann suggests is the estrangement between Jane Rochford and her husband.

The traditional reason given by historians for the failure of the marriage of Jane and George Rochford was Rochford's adultery, as suggested by Cavendish's verses. Cavendish put these damning words into George's mouth on the scaffold:

My lyfe not chast, my lyving bestyall
I fforced wydowes, maydens I did deflower
All was oon to me, I spared non at all
My appetit was all women to devoure³²

Women were expected to turn a blind eye to a husband's infidelity, and Jane behaved in a way that was not typical of her sex by refusing to do so. This is one of the reasons given by Warnicke to suggest that George Boleyn's infidelity was of an unusual kind. Her evidence for describing George as a homosexual, (a capital offence following the Buggery Act of 1534), included the possession of a an expensive music book by both George and the musician Mark Smeaton, suggesting an intimate friendship between them. George's statement on the scaffold that he deserved to die is also cited as evidence of his homosexuality.³³ As Warnicke suggests, Jane Rochford might have been sufficiently shocked by the discovery of her husband's homosexuality to give evidence against him. Equally, to be married to a man who was described as an unlawful lecher by Cavendish, whatever the particular nature of his lechery, might eventually have been too much for her.³⁴ Cavendish, a loyal

³¹ *L.P.* vol. 9 no. 566; Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, p. 339; Paul Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn: A chapter in English history 1527-1536* (London 1884) vol.2 p. 128-9

³² George Cavendish *Metrical Visions* ed. S.W. Singer (London 1825) line 22 ff. [printed in the *Life of Cardinal Wolsey*]; Retha Warnicke, *The rise and fall of Anne Boleyn* p. 215

³³ Warnicke, *op. cit.* p. 218

³⁴ Eric Ives suggests that while the relationship between Anne and George Boleyn was innocent, Jane may still have been jealous of 'whatever relationship did exist', but also that by 1535 Jane had become a partisan of Mary's, and may have been part of a plot against Anne. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* p. 376. However this still presupposes

follower of Wolsey, was an enemy of the Boleyns, but he presumably had some grounds for his blackening of Boleyn's character, if only rumour.

Neither of these possible explanations for Jane's hostility to her husband appear in the accounts of his trial, where indeed her name features little. Gilbert Burnet, writing in the seventeenth century, probably had access to a contemporary account by Anthony Anthony, a surveyor of the Ordnance at the Tower, now lost. This lost account may have described Jane Rochford as 'a particular instrument in the death of Queen Anne'.³⁵ Burnet, gifted with hindsight, called Jane 'a woman of no sort of vertue' and described her as spiteful, and jealous of her husband. According to Burnet, Jane 'carried many stories to the King, or some about him, to persuade that there was familiarity between the Queen and her Brother, beyond what so near a relation could justifie'. According to the bishop, the only grounds for this was that George Rochford was once seen 'leaning upon her bed'.³⁶ Jane Rochford's evidence may have helped the King dispose of his unwanted wife, but the later stages of her career do not suggest that this service was much appreciated, thus suggesting that even if Bishop Burnet was correct Jane's testimony was not decisive.

Jane Rochford's name did occur once in the trial of her husband. According to Chapuys, at one point in the trial George was handed a piece of paper with an additional charge, to which he was told to answer simply 'yes' or 'no'. Knowing that whatever happened his fate was already determined, George instead read out the words of the charge to the no doubt highly titillated court. He was accused of discussing with his sister whether or not the king was impotent. Anne had repeated this to Jane with the damning words 'le Roy nestoit habille en cas de soy copuler avec femme et quil navait ne vertu ne puissance'.³⁷ This comment could only have come from Lady Rochford herself, but there is no indication whether she volunteered the information or whether it was obtained from her under interrogation. The latter would seem more likely; it was surely a highly dangerous matter to admit to

a breakdown of some kind in Jane's marriage, or she would not have been party to such a fatal accusation against her husband.

³⁵ Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, p. 376

³⁶ Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation* (London 1681, 2nd edition) vol. 1 Bk.3 p. 197

³⁷ *Cal. S.P. Span* vol. 5ii 1536-38 pp. 122-131; Friedman *Anne Boleyn* vol. 2 p. 280 quotes the despatch in French.

discussing the king's sexual potency, even with her closest relations. Apart from anything else, as Chapuys said to doubt the king's virility was to prejudice any future offspring which the king might engender.

If there had been any glimmer of a possibility of mercy for George Rochford, it must have disappeared then. Before his trial Jane had sent a message to her husband in the Tower, with the King's express permission,³⁸ but there was no possibility that she could have obtained him mercy now even had she so wished. Like his fascinating but ultimately unfortunate sister, George Boleyn was brought to the block, and as customary his property was confiscated. This of course affected his widow Jane as well.

At the time of Lady Rochford's marriage a payment of two thousand marks had been made by her father and the King to the Earl of Wiltshire to provide her jointure during a possible widowhood. When that widowhood came, she was given a payment of a mere hundred marks a year 'whych is very hard for me to schyffte the world wythall' though for the majority of the population of Tudor England it would have seemed a fortune. In an attempt to remedy this situation Jane wrote to Thomas Cromwell, describing herself as 'a power desolat wydow wythout comffort'. She begged Cromwell to move the King on her behalf for a return of her husband's 'power stuffe and plate' which she stressed 'ys nothyng to be regardyd' to the king but would be a 'most hygh helpe' to her. In addition to this request for the return of George's moveables, she begged Cromwell to help her to what she considered a more reasonable living. She asked him to remind the king of her situation, assuring Cromwell of the reward that God would give to those who helped 'powere forsaken wydos'. A modern reader of this letter might find its tone of self abasement nauseating, but Jane, aware of Cromwell's power and influence, chose her words deliberately before she signed the letter (thus incidentally giving a proof of her literacy).³⁹ The self abasement might have been galling, but Jane clearly considered it either necessary, or at least likely to be advantageous.

Probably as a result of this letter Cromwell did indeed take up Lady Rochford's case with the King and both of them put pressure on the unfortunate earl of Wiltshire to increase the allowance which he made to his daughter-in-law. On the

³⁸ Ives, *Anne Boleyn* p 377

³⁹ B.L. Cottonian Mss. Vespasian F XIII part 2 f199 [formerly f. 109b]

very day on which he received letters from both king and minister 'concernyng an augmentacion of lyving to my daughter of Rochford', Wiltshire wrote a reply to Cromwell in his own 'ill hand'. The earl set out the existing arrangements for Jane. She had one hundred marks at present, which would be increased by another two hundred marks a year at his death. (He did not mention the two thousand marks paid over by Lord Morley at the marriage.) However, 'alonly to satysfye the kynges desyre and plesur' Wiltshire agreed that he would add an extra fifty marks to Jane's hundred during his lifetime, making one hundred pounds a year for her to live on. After his death, he reminded Cromwell, Jane would have three hundred marks. We do not know unfortunately if Wiltshire kept his word, but since Jane managed to retain royal favour until her own downfall it seems likely.

In her letter to Cromwell, Jane Rochford uses the words 'my husbonde . . . whome god pardon'.⁴⁰ From this Retha Warnicke deduces that Jane was convinced of her husband's guilt. This is surely placing too much emphasis on what could be a mere conventional form of words, the equivalent of the pious 'God rest his soul' when the name of a dead person was mentioned. All people could be regarded as sinners, dependent on divine mercy, no matter how apparently virtuous their lives. George Boleyn had himself admitted to this kind of guilt on the scaffold. To conclude from Jane's invoking a blessing on his memory that she believed him guilty as charged is stretching the evidence further than is justified. On the other hand the fact that Jane Rochford wrote to Cromwell and asked him to invoke the king's help on her behalf may be seen as indicating that the relations between Jane and her father-in-law were less than good. This is more likely to mean that Wiltshire blamed Jane for his son's downfall, than that she was convinced of George's guilt. It could also merely mean that Jane had already applied to the earl for more money without success, and so was bringing in reinforcements.

The help given to Jane in obtaining her jointure has been seen as evidence to support the view that she was instrumental in obtaining Anne Boleyn's fall.⁴¹ If this is so, it could be suggested that the government did not value her services very highly if an extra fifty marks a year was all she obtained. For a more valuable financial reward

⁴⁰ Warnicke, *Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* p. 217

⁴¹ E.g. Ives *Anne Boleyn*, p. 377 'Cromwell carefully looked after her interests once she was a widow'; Byrne, *Lisle Letters* vol. 3 p. 380-1

she had to wait until 1539, when parliament confirmed the award of manors for the jointure, including the Boleyn manor of Blickling in Norfolk, which had been held previously by the earl of Wiltshire's mother Margaret, as well as Utlecote and Loxley in Warwickshire. Jane seems to have lived at Blickling, or at least left property there.⁴²

It is not clear whether or not Lord Rochford's 'stuffe and plate' was returned to his widow, although she did later possess a fine bed which seems to have been his. We do however have an interesting glimpse of Jane's possessions at this time in an inventory of the contents of a chest left in the 'chamber over the kechen' in May 1536.⁴³ They may have been discarded as rubbish, though with a few exceptions they do not seem to be worthless. Two rosaries or 'pears of bedes' are described as broken, and a 'fote of silver and gilt of a ivory coffer' was presumably broken from its coffer and therefore of little value. The other items would seem to be more desirable, including various detachable parts of garments such as sleeves and placards, all in rich materials.⁴⁴ Another interesting and probably expensive garment was a pair of 'knyt hosez' of 'whit silke wrought wt gold', described as 'for masking'. Knitted stockings were a rarity, as opposed to lengths of fabric cut up and sewn to fit.⁴⁵

Evidence has already been given of Jane Rochford's ability to sign her name. Despite being himself a scholar, Lord Morley does not seem to have given Jane a classical education such as that given by Thomas More to his daughters. However the discarded chest does give further evidence of Jane's literacy, since three books are mentioned. Unfortunately with one exception the clerk who made the inventory was more interested in the rich bindings of the books than their contents. One is described as 'covered wt crymsen velvet' and the other as 'covered wt black velvet and [with] a clasp of silver'. No indication is given of the books' titles, which might have given us a clue to Jane Rochford's literary tastes. The third book, again richly bound 'bored wt silver & gilt wt one clasp' is however identified as 'a prymer'. Primers were Latin

⁴² L.P. vol. 14 no. 867; L.P. vol. 15 no 1032; Warnicke, *Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* p. 237;

⁴³ S.P. 1/104/82; see appendix 3 p. 297 for a transcription of the list.

⁴⁴ A placard was a 'front or fill-in' perhaps used as a background for the lacing of a bodice. C.W. and P. Cunnington, *Handbook of English costume in the sixteenth century* (London 1970) p. 210

⁴⁵ Jane wore a cloth of gold costume in the Calais masque of 1532. There is a discussion on Tudor stockings in Byrne, *Lisle Letters* vol. 2 p. 587-8

Horae or Books of Hours based originally on the pattern of the monastic office. They contained prayers and texts including psalms, and usually 'an additional range of popular devotions'. Primers were very popular with the laity at many levels of society and circulated in both manuscript and printed versions. Though the book was designed for use, it was often seen as a sacred object in itself, usually containing many illustrations of the life of Christ and the Blessed Virgin. This aspect of the primer might explain why Jane's was a richly presented book. But it appears that this 'sacred object' had little value to Jane Rochford, or she would not have left the primer in the chest in the room above the kitchen.⁴⁶

As with Lady Lisle, clients regarded Lady Rochford as a patron who could help them. In a long and rather rambling letter to Thomas Cromwell written some time in 1536, a cleric named William Forster put forward his claims to a benefice which he considered he had been unfairly denied. Forster was a client of Lady Rochford's, and clearly she had already been asked to put his case to Cromwell. In his letter to the minister Forster referred to Cromwell's 'gret favours and singuler goodnes' in the business in which 'my laydy of Rechforthe (most special patroness of my stody) traveled to yow for me'. Equally clearly, Forster did not think Lady Rochford by herself would obtain for him the desired advowson of 'Sopham' (Swaffham), so he sensibly wrote his own appeal to the Vice-Gerent in Spirituals.⁴⁷

Jane Rochford, it has been suggested, simply wanted to be on the winning side.⁴⁸ She certainly achieved this, despite the Boleyn tragedy. She served the next three queens and was in royal service until her downfall. Such evidence as there is of her property at her death implies considerable prosperity, and she managed to put any suggestion of disgrace behind her. She received a jewel from Jane Seymour, described as a 'tablet of gold',⁴⁹ and took part in that queen's funeral procession, travelling in the second chair with her mother Lady Morley. During the service she held the Lady Mary's train, emphasizing the friendly relations between the Morley family and the King's elder daughter.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See Eamonn Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London 1992) pp. 210-265 for a discussion on primers

⁴⁷ PR O. S P. 1/104/282

⁴⁸ Antonia Fraser, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (London 1992) p. 252

⁴⁹ B L. Royal Ms. 7C xvi f.22

⁵⁰ *L.P.* vol 12ii no. 1060

This friendship, or perhaps clientage, is further reinforced by evidence from the Privy Purse records kept for Mary after her readmission to her father's favour in 1536, following the deaths of both Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn.⁵¹ Lady Rochford presented New Year gifts in 1537, 1538 and 1540, and rewards were given to the servants delivering them.⁵² Perhaps on an earlier occasion Lady Rochford had presented Mary with a clock, for in January 1537 a payment of five shillings was made 'for mending of the Clocke which my lades grace had of my Lady rochford'.⁵³ In April 1537 Mary in her turn presented Lady Rochford with a dress length of twelve yards of black satin, costing seven shillings and sevenpence the yard.⁵⁴ A year later, in April 1538, twelve pence was paid to Lady Rochford's servant and a further eleven shillings and seven pence to 'my Lady of Rochfords woman'.⁵⁵ The former sum was no doubt a gratuity to the servant for delivering a letter or token, but the larger sum to the "woman" perhaps represents payment for some task undertaken. It should be noted that servants bringing the New Year gifts were not always given the same reward. In 1538 Lady Rochford's servant was rewarded with ten shillings, while her father Lord Morley's servant received only five shillings.⁵⁶

Lord Morley continued to maintain his relationship with Mary after Lady Rochford's death, and the detailed New Year Gift lists of 1543 and 1544 show him presenting what the lists laconically call 'a boke', perhaps one of his own translations.⁵⁷ An earlier New Year's gift had been 'A New Year's Angelical Salutation, by Thos. Aquine'. In his dedicatory preface Morley had praised the princess's own scholarship, and in particular a prayer which she herself had translated from Aquinas. He told the princess that he had copied this prayer in his book, and also into his wife's and children's books, so that they too would pray for Mary.⁵⁸ This incidentally tells us something about the way the Morley family were brought up,

⁵¹ Frederick Madden *Privy Purse Expenses of the Princess Mary* (London 1831)

⁵² Madden *op. cit.* pp. 7, 51, 82

⁵³ Madden *op. cit.* p. 13

⁵⁴ Madden *op. cit.* p. 17. Fabrics were often very narrow, silks might be only 22 inches wide (half the standard modern width) so large yardages were needed. Alison Sim, *Food and Feast in Tudor England*, p. 2

⁵⁵ Madden *op. cit.* pp. 64-65

⁵⁶ Madden *op. cit.* p. 51

⁵⁷ Madden *op. cit.* pp. 97, 138

⁵⁸ Madden *op. cit.* p. cxxvii-viii

each with their own prayer books into which their own individual prayers could be written. It also causes one to wonder whether one of the books left in the chest might have been this personal book. Morley's dedications to Mary continued into his old age when his memoir of his former mistress Lady Margaret Beaufort was dedicated to the Queen.⁵⁹

Jane Rochford retained King Henry's favour as well as his daughter's. When the King married Anne of Cleves, Lady Rochford became one of her ladies. As is well known the King, though protesting his own continuing sexual capacity (despite Anne Boleyn's canard repeated to Jane Rochford), found himself unable to consummate his marriage. As part of the process of dissolving this marriage various statements were made by those involved. The king was quoted by his doctor, Dr Butts, as saying that the flaccidity of Anne's breasts and belly suggested that the new Queen was not a virgin.⁶⁰ The accounts of her ladies however suggest on the contrary an almost complete ignorance of sexual knowledge, let alone experience. Some six months after the wedding a group of ladies: Lady Rochford, Lady Rutland, and Lady Edgecomb, talked with the Queen and wished her with child. Rather to their surprise she assured them that she was not. Lady Edgecomb said 'How is it possible for your Grace to know that, and ly every night with the King?' Anne insisted that she was not pregnant, and Lady Edgecomb, perhaps almost teasing said 'I think your Grace is a mayd stil' This was taken up by Lady Rochford with 'By our Lady, madam, I think your grace is a mayd stil, indede'. Poor Anne indignantly asked how she could still be a maid since she slept every night with the King. Realising this was meant literally the forthright Lady Rochford replied 'There must be more than that'. The Queen then described the King kissing her, holding her hand, calling her 'swete hart' and said naively 'is not thys enough?' Lady Rutland assured her it was not. 'Madam, there must be more than this, or it will be long or we have a Duke of York, which al this realm most desireth'. Further questioning showed that the queen had confided nothing of this to Mother Lowe, her senior attendant from Cleves. She was embarrassed at the very suggestion saying 'Mary, fy, fy, for shame, God forbid'. The ladies must have been sure of the situation by now, but questioned the queen on further occasions both separately and together. Lady Rochford in particular

⁵⁹ see above p. 155

⁶⁰ Fraser, *Six wives of Henry VIII* p. 311

questioned her about her wedding night, but it was clear the marriage had not been consummated.⁶¹

The way was clear for the King's marriage to his Flemish wife to be annulled. On 11 July at Richmond, Anne of Cleves formally signed a letter of consent to the divorce, in the presence of the Duke of Suffolk and a group of ladies including Lady Rochford.⁶² A generous settlement was made to the King's new 'sister', and within days Henry had married yet again, this time following his own inclination with the help of the manipulations of the Howard clan. The royal ladies in waiting more or less automatically moved into the new queen's service, but for Jane Rochford the automatic move was to prove of momentous and disastrous significance. Jane was of course a distant member of the Howard clan through her father's step-father as well as through her Boleyn marriage, and this may have drawn the King's new wife towards her. Katherine Howard had served her turn as one of Anne of Cleves' maids in waiting, and while the maids had a lesser status than the ladies the two women were surely acquainted. Katherine, very young if far from inexperienced, liked to have friends around her.⁶³ Three of her chamberers, Katherine Tylney, Margaret Morton and Alice Restwold, were old friends, as was her private secretary Francis Dereham. Lady Rochford, much older than this group, none the less became a member of the inner circle.

We do not know how well Lady Rochford knew the Queen when she entered her service, but we do know much about Katherine's relations with the other members of this little group. All those named above had been members of the old Duchess of Norfolk's households at Lambeth and Horsham. Katherine Howard had been brought up in the household of Agnes, Duchess of Norfolk, widow of the second Duke and stepmother of the third Duke, following standard upper class practice in the sixteenth century.⁶⁴ The intention was that the young person would acquire polish and manners by this elevated form of service, and at the same time create a network of useful

⁶¹ John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials* (Oxford 1822: first pub. 1721) vol. 1 pt. 2 p. 462-3

⁶² *L.P.* vol. 15 no. 872

⁶³ Lacy Baldwin Smith, *A Tudor Tragedy: the life and times of Katherine Howard* (London 1961) p.156

⁶⁴ G. McCracken 'The Exchange of Children in Tudor England' *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983) pp. 303-313

contacts which could perhaps be activated later when patronage was required. Some 'hosts' took their duties extremely seriously, but it would seem that Duchess Agnes had a far more relaxed approach to her duties, so long as the surface proprieties were maintained.

Young men and young women had separate dormitories in the old duchess's household, and it would seem that at least in theory the sexes were supposed to be segregated at night. In practice however some of the young women received their male friends in the dormitory (the available evidence does not suggest that the women went to the men's dormitory). Though as was usual two or more girls shared a bed, a young woman was still able to have her male friend lying on, or even in the bed with her, and they were sometimes 'in naked bed' or without clothes.⁶⁵

Katherine Howard's first love in the Duchess's household was a music master, Henry Manno. In time honoured fashion Manno asked Katherine for proof that she loved him, and according to a third person said 'yet lett me feyle yor secretes naming the thyngs playnly'. She agreed, provided that was all he wanted, and when they met a few days later 'in the duches chapell chamber in the dark evenyng' he reminded her of her promise. She 'was contented' and he was allowed his wish. As he put it 'he felt more than was convenyet' on several occasions until the duchess discovered them together.⁶⁶ The duchess broke off the relationship, but mainly because Manno, although a gentleman, was not sufficiently high born for a Howard.⁶⁷ Katherine later denied that she had known Manno carnally, while admitting to a good deal of fondling. Manno though was said to have claimed that he 'wold have his pleasure on the said Lady kateyn when he list'.⁶⁸

Katherine now had a far more serious relationship, with Francis Dereham, and most of the accusations that were later made about Katherine concern him. Francis Dereham was well born and a cousin of Katherine's.⁶⁹ She considered him as a possible husband, and no doubt saw no wrong in what they were doing.⁷⁰ There are

⁶⁵ Katherine's behaviour while a girl in the Duchess's household was revealed in the depositions taken before her trial. See P.R.O. S.P.1/167 ff. 155-157, 161-162.

⁶⁶ S.P. 1/167/161 (Manno's deposition)

⁶⁷ Fraser, *Six wives of Henry VIII* p. 320

⁶⁸ S.P. 1/167/162

⁶⁹ Smith, *Tudor Tragedy* p. 46

⁷⁰ Fraser, *op. cit.* p. 321, suggests that Katherine may have considered herself betrothed to Dereham, in which case their relationship 'had nothing so very terrible

several witnesses who saw Dereham lying on Katherine's bed, talking to her late into the night, but more seriously there were also witnesses to their lying together 'in naked bed', sometimes with the curtains drawn.⁷¹ Two witnesses, Alice Restwold or Wylkes, and Katherine Tylney, clearly believed that there was full sexual intercourse between them.⁷² Confirmation of this would seem to come from the conversation between Katherine Howard and Dereham, overheard by Margaret Benet, when

the said deram saye that although he used the company of a woman a C times yet he wold get no child except he listed & that the quene made answeere therto in lyke wyse that a woman myght medell with a man & yet conceyve no chyld onles she wold herself.⁷³

Not suprisingly in this sort of household where even in the jakes people were not always alone, Henry Mannoxx learned of Katherine's affair with Francis Dereham, and in his jealousy wrote an anonymous letter to the Duchess which he left in her chapel pew.⁷⁴ The angry Duchess slapped Katherine, and others within reach, but otherwise nothing very serious happened, suggesting that no one was too upset by what had occurred. What is clear from all this though is that the young Katherine Howard had been awakened to the pleasures of sex and saw no reason why she should not enjoy them.

Unfortunately for Katherine, fate and the Howards decreed that it was not her lover Dereham she was to marry, but the King himself. By now Henry was nearly fifty, huge, and in doubtful health, but he was still King and enormously powerful. He had fallen in love with Katherine and decided he would marry her. Katherine could hardly refuse him, though she may have had little idea what marriage to the King really meant. The King for his part was besotted with the girl, thirty years his junior, and as he assumed an innocent virgin.

In some ways it must be said she surely was innocent, or at least naive. It does not seem to have occurred to her that she was making herself vulnerable to blackmail by employing old colleagues like Katherine Tylney and Alice Restwold in her chamber, and by the considerable folly of making Francis Dereham her secretary.

about it by the standards of the time', though contemporary moralists would not agree.

⁷¹ S.P. 1/167/155-157, 161 Depositions of Margaret Benet, Malyn Tylney, Edward Walgrave, Katherine Tylney, Alice Restwold, & Robert Davenport

⁷² S.P. 1/167/157

⁷³ S.P. 1/167/155

⁷⁴ S.P. 1/167/161; Fraser, *Six wives of Henry VIII*, p. 321

In fact they did not blackmail her, and only betrayed her when she had already been accused, but she was surely taking an enormous risk.⁷⁵

This then was the background into which Lady Rochford came, as an established Lady of the bedchamber, when Katherine Howard married the king. The problems of Jane Rochford's past were forgotten and she rapidly became her mistress's confidante. When Katherine had first gone to court she had made the acquaintance of Thomas Culpeper, one of the King's Privy Chamber and a distant cousin on her mother's side. Perhaps even then she had begun to love him, but great events intervened, and Katherine married the King. But within less than a year Katherine had embarked on a relationship with Culpeper. On Maundy Thursday, the queen sent for Culpeper and in her private rooms gave him fine gifts, a velvet cap with a brooch on it and a chain, which she told him to conceal under his cloak.⁷⁶ In April 1541 Katherine wrote to Culpeper, most of the letter in her own hand, saying 'it makes my heart die to think I cannot be always in your company'. She urged Culpeper to come to see her, adding 'praying you than that you wyll com whan my lade Rochforthe ys here for then I shalbe beste at leaysoure to be at your commaudemnt'.⁷⁷ The message is clear : I can trust Lady Rochford not to give us away. Lady Rochford had begun her fateful - and fatal - role as go-between, some would say pander, in the queen's last love affair.

Even at this point, before too much damage had been done, it is worth questioning what Lady Rochford was doing. It is impossible that she could not have been aware of the risks involved. Her own husband had died on less evidence of adultery than this letter itself contained. Did she gain a vicarious sexual pleasure from observing and assisting the queen's love affair? She was after all a widow and no suggestion has been made that she herself had a lover. Or was she a romantic who saw the Queen and Culpeper as young 'star-crossed lovers' whose cause she could assist? It is hard to resist the conclusion that she behaved with remarkable folly in

⁷⁵ Fraser suggests that the appointment of Dereham may have been a 'handsome bribe' to keep his mouth shut. *Six wives of Henry VIII*, p. 341

⁷⁶ S.P. 1/167/157; Fraser, *Six wives of Henry VIII*, p. 341, following Hall, has 'a chair and a rich cap'. However the ms. clearly shows 'chayne' rather than 'chayre', as well as it being more likely. A chain would clearly be much easier to conceal under a cloak than would a chair.

⁷⁷ S.P.1/167/13

assisting the lovers, when she could on the contrary have used her influence with the queen to persuade her of the probable consequences of her actions if they were discovered. Although the evidence that Lady Rochford incited the lovers to their affair may be of dubious veracity, there is no suggestion that she tried to dissuade them, and for that at least she must stand condemned.

In the summer of 1541 the king began a northern progress, accompanied by his queen. One of the purposes of the journey was a proposed meeting with his nephew the King of Scotland. Another possible purpose, it was rumoured, was to crown the new queen in York. This it was thought would come about if the queen found herself to be pregnant on this progress. In fact neither event took place. The Scottish King's advisors feared kidnap, and were reluctant to risk James V's safety by allowing him so far into English territory as York. Nor did Queen Katherine become pregnant, so there was no coronation. But the royal progress was slow, dignified and showy, with 'a train that resembled an army of occupation more than the suite of a royal progress'.⁷⁸ They went to Grafton, on to Lincoln, to Pontefract and finally to York. It should be remembered that only a few years before, in 1536-7, this area of the north had been alight with rebellion. This splendid and unique royal progress (the King's only journey so far north) gave Henry the chance to remind his subjects of his power, and to offer them the promise of royal attention.

For Katherine, Culpeper and Lady Rochford though, the northern progress offered quite different promise. Though the royal apartments must surely have been more cramped on progress than at Greenwich, Richmond or Hampton, the young couple seemed to have found many opportunities to be together, and Lady Rochford did her best to help them. Margaret Morton, another of the queen's ladies, watched Katherine suspiciously as she looked out of a window at Culpeper, and her mistrust grew when the queen sent her with a 'privy letter' to Lady Rochford. This was answered on the following day by Lady Rochford with another letter 'without superscription' and the message that the queen should keep it secret. The implication here is that Lady Rochford was acting as a go-between and that the letter without the tell tale superscription might be from Culpeper. Morton though may be a prejudiced witness, for she also said that at Pomfret the queen said she would put Morton and

⁷⁸ J.J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (1968) pp. 427-8, 433

'loffkyng' out of her chamber 'without cause to this deponent's knowledge'.

According to Margaret Morton 'the lady of Rochford was the pryncypall occasion off [the queen's] ffoly'.⁷⁹ A similar line was later to be taken by both the queen herself and Culpeper, but in their cases they were desperately trying to shift blame from themselves and they may not have been telling the exact truth.

As the progress continued, so the queen and Lady Rochford checked each new house they stayed in to see if there was a convenient and safe back access. 'The quene wold in any howse seke ffor the back dores and back steppes' as Culpeper himself admitted.⁸⁰ This was not always a simple matter. At Lincoln the two women hovered around the back door at eleven o'clock at night waiting for Culpeper, when the watchman came by and noticing the door was still open, locked it. Shortly afterwards Culpeper appeared, and in answer to their surprised enquiries told them he had picked the lock.⁸¹ On other nights at Lincoln they had less difficulty, and on at least one occasion Culpeper spent the whole night with the queen from eleven until three. While the lovers were together, according to her own account Lady Rochford slept in an adjoining room, until the queen called out to her to go to the door to answer Mrs Lovekyn. Lady Rochford did not make it clear whether this was before or after Culpeper had left the queen. In Culpeper's version of the story, only Lady Rochford was present with the queen and himself, but this would not necessarily rule out her being in an adjacent room or ante-room.⁸²

While at Lincoln it was possible for the queen to find some privacy, when travelling it was more difficult. Again Lady Rochford served as the lovers' messenger, and as the royal party travelled between Lincoln and 'Pomfret' she sent word to Culpeper that the queen would have sent for him 'iff ther ben any place that wold have served'.⁸³ At Pontefract there were further meetings. Lady Rochford stood at the far end of the chamber, while the queen stood on the top step of the staircase, and Culpeper on the stairs ready to slip away if they heard any noise. Again the queen was nervous and feared the King had set a watch by the back entrance to her apartments. Lady Rochford, resourceful, set a watch of her own. Her servant

⁷⁹ S.P. 1 167/162, and see also S.P.1/167/153-4

⁸⁰ S.P. 1 167 158

⁸¹ S.P. 1/167/159

⁸² S.P. 1/167/158-9

⁸³ S.P.1/167/158

watched one night in the courtyard to see if the watchman paid any special attention to the queen's back door. Satisfied that all was safe, the two lovers were able to meet the following night. No evidence is given as to what excuse Lady Rochford gave to her servant to explain his task, but it was presumably not the truth.⁸⁴

It was at Pontefract also that there were harsh words between the queen and some of her women. Margaret Morton reported that the queen threatened to dismiss her and 'mestrys lovffkyn'. Morton suggested that if the queen had indeed put them away, she would instead have 'taken other off my lade off rochfordes pouttyng'. However Margaret Morton seems to have been of a jealous disposition. She disliked Katherine Tylney and disapproved of her influence over the queen, as well as that of Lady Rochford, so again she may not be an entirely reliable witness.⁸⁵

At York, while the King waited for nine days until it became quite obvious that he had been publicly disappointed in his purpose of meeting his nephew of Scotland, his young wife again found opportunity to meet her lover. At least once the pair met not at the back door but in Lady Rochford's chamber, though Culpeper when he admitted this did not make it clear whether Lady Rochford was also present. Culpeper showed his dependence on Lady Rochford by sending her a ring, while on another occasion Culpeper had, perhaps teasingly, taken a cramp ring from Lady Rochford's finger, which she then told him was the queen's. Lady Rochford told the queen this tale, which led to the queen taking another ring from her own finger, and giving it to Jane to take to Culpeper, saying it was an 'ill sight to see hym weare but one crampe ryng'⁸⁶

Despite all these meetings and gifts (including a pair of bracelets to 'kepe his armes warme') the queen was still nervous about her relationship with Culpeper. The King of course had since 1534 been Supreme Head of the Church, and Katherine had a very superstitious idea of the powers this would give him. She warned Culpeper that he should take great care not to 'shryve hym of any such thynges as shuld passe betwext her and hym' for fear that 'surely the kyng being supreme hedd of the church shuld have knowledge of it'. According to the queen's own confession she regularly

⁸⁴ S.P. 1/167/158-9

⁸⁵ S.P. 1/167/153-4

⁸⁶ S.P.1/167/159

expressed her fear to Lady Rochford that she would be 'spyed' one day and then 'we be all undone'.⁸⁷

Ironically Katherine's downfall did not come through a spy on the progress or indeed through the King's supernatural powers. As the royal party made its way south again the King was in good humour with Katherine, and at Hull presented her with a fine jewel. By the first of November the king and queen had returned to Hampton Court where Henry made a solemn thanksgiving for his happy marriage. Alas for both parties to the marriage, disaster was imminent. One of the women who had served in the old Duchess of Norfolk's household, Mary Hall formerly Lascelles, had been talking to her brother John about what had taken place in that household, and in particular about the bedroom activities of the teenaged Katherine Howard. John Lascelles decided that this information was too important to keep to himself and reported what he had been told to Thomas Cranmer.⁸⁸ Since at this point the king was still away, the horrified Archbishop told Audley and Hertford, the other members of the council remaining in London, and they agreed that the King must be told. Lascelles' report suggested that there might have been a marriage contract between Katherine and Dereham, and if so this would compromise the validity of the King's own marriage. Bearing in mind King Henry's difficult previous marital history such a thing could not be ignored, but not surprisingly the Archbishop shrank from telling his master directly. As a compromise the accusations against the queen were written down, and the letter handed to Henry at mass on All Souls Day, November 2. Only the day before Henry had thanked God for his happy marriage. Now he could not believe the truth of these accusations, and ordered that they should be investigated so that his wife's name could be cleared.

Francis Dereham, Henry Mannoxx and Mary Hall herself were questioned immediately, and it became apparent that Mary's story was true, as both Dereham and Mannoxx admitted to their relationships with Katherine. Dereham admitted to carnal knowledge of the queen before her marriage. Various other witnesses were questioned and as has been seen above they too admitted to the intimate relationship

⁸⁷ S.P.1.167/159; *H.M.C. Bath* vol.2 (London 1907) pp. 9-10

⁸⁸ Fraser, *Six wives of Henry VIII* p. 345 suggests that Lascelles, a supporter of religious reform, was moved to act by his fear of the increasing influence of the 'religious reactionaries' in the Howard party.

between the young Katherine and Dereham. Dereham was tortured, but the confirmatory evidence of the other witnesses made it clear that the torture revealed only the truth. The queen herself confirmed that Dereham had 'used me in such sort as a man doth his wife, many and sundry times'.⁸⁹ However, while the discovery that his young wife was not the innocent virgin he had assumed but a sexually experienced woman, was a terrible blow to the King, this in itself did not invalidate the King's marriage. Katherine in fact refused to admit that she had had a marriage contract with Dereham which might have saved her. Even a contract *per verba de futuro* became a marriage if there was sexual consummation. In such circumstances Katherine might have claimed that she did no wrong with Dereham. But this did not happen, and soon other even more damning evidence came to light, as Dereham himself brought the name of Thomas Culpeper to the Council's attention.

Now Thomas Culpeper, Lady Rochford and the Queen herself were all questioned about the relationship. Lady Rochford admitted the meetings between Katherine and Culpeper, but claimed that they had spoken 'secretly', or she had been at the other end of the room and heard nothing, or she had been asleep while they were together. She did however admit that 'consydering all thynges [she] hath herd and seen betwene them' she thought that Culpeper had carnall knowledge of the queen⁹⁰

In the brief period between the queen's arrival in London and her arrest and departure for confinement at Syon, it seems unlikely she would have had much opportunity to see Culpeper for them to arrive at a common statement, but she expressed her anxiety to Lady Rochford and asked her what news she had of Culpeper, saying 'iff that matter cam not [out]she fferyd not for no thyng'.⁹¹ Even if they did not collude however, both the queen and Culpeper took a very similar line in their evidence. They both blamed Lady Rochford.

According to Queen Katherine, it was Lady Rochford who approached her sundry times, urging her to speak to Culpeper, who 'desiereth nothing elles but to speke with her' and for whom Lady Rochford 'durst swere uppon a booke he ment nothing but honestye'. When the queen after their meetings had begun, expressed her

⁸⁹ Smith *Tudor Tragedy* p. 185

⁹⁰ S.P. 1/167/159

⁹¹ S.P.1/167/159

fear that 'this wol be spyed oon day and then we be all ondone', Lady Rochford dismissed those fears. Even the way that Lady Rochford would turn her back or 'sytt sumwhat farre' from the lovers was used against her by the queen who claimed that she had urged Lady Rochford to sit near to them. Katherine admitted, perhaps because there were other witnesses, that Lady Rochford would seek out the back doors at all her lodgings. She added that when they returned to Greenwich Jane told her 'she knew an old kechyn wherin she myght well speke with hym'. The word 'kechyn' carries an echo of the 'room over the kitchen' where Lady Rochford's chest was found in 1536, making one wonder if it could be the same place.⁹² Even if it was not, the idea of such a rendezvous makes it quite plain that Lady Rochford knew the risks of Katherine's behaviour; queens would hardly expect to pursue innocent friendships in abandoned domestic offices. Katherine suggested that she had wished to end the relationship with Culpeper, and once again used Lady Rochford as the intermediary: ' alas madam woll this never have ende. i pray youe, byd hym desier no more to troble me or send to me'. Lady Rochford duly passed on the message but received the unwelcome answer that 'he besought me to send hym no such word for he wold take no suche aunswer'.

Katherine Howard, political representative of religious conservatism, also used the religious argument with Lady Rochford.

hir grace seith that when she toke hir right last she giff hir warnyng to troble hir no more with suche light matters wheronto she aunswered 'yet must yow gyff men leave to looke for they woll looke uppon yowe'

Such an argument might carry weight with Katherine, but it was unlikely to appeal to the King. It does suggest that Katherine for all her easy morals had some religious beliefs, if of a superstitious nature. The need not to be troubled with 'light' matters when she took communion may suggest a genuine effort to reform her behaviour (as was no doubt the impression she wished to give) or it may be of a piece with her fear of the supernatural powers of the Supreme Head.⁹³

Like the queen, Thomas Culpeper attempted to shift the blame onto Lady Rochford. He recorded her presence with the queen on various occasions, and showed how she had been the conveyer of 'fond messages' between them. Most damningly he said that Lady Rochford 'provoked him much to love the quene

⁹² see above, p. 164

⁹³ *H.M.C.Bath* vol 2 pp. 9-10

showyng also to hym how much the quene loved hym'. Culepeper did not actually admit to adultery, but did admit that he 'entended and meant to do ill with the quene & that in lykwise the quene so myndeth to do with hym'.⁹⁴

There could have been no real doubt in anyone's mind what the end would be, but the tragedy moved quite slowly to its inevitable conclusion. On the 6th November King Henry left Hampton Court for Whitehall, where at an all night Council meeting he was given the evidence of Katherine's relationship with Dereham and Manno. The King first raged, shouting for a sword to kill Katherine, then became tearful.⁹⁵ More interrogations continued over the next few days, including those of the queen herself. Following one visit at an early stage of the investigations, Cranmer wrote that the queen was 'almost in a fransy'. Even in her distress, however, Katherine was sufficiently aware of the danger of her position to insist that everything Dereham did was 'of his importune forcement and in a maner violence rather than of her fre consent'⁹⁶ At this stage of course Culpeper's name had not yet been mentioned. On the 11th November orders were given to convey the queen to the former convent at Syon. Although clearly a prisoner by this stage, she was to be attended by four ladies and two chamberers and was allotted six separate sets of clothes but it was emphasised that she was to be permitted no jewels, not even as trimmings on a garment. Her chambers were to be 'hanged with mean stuff' without any cloth of state.⁹⁷ Arrangements were made for the various notable members of the queen's household,⁹⁸ but no mention was made of what was to happen to Lady Rochford. Lady Rochford was questioned on the 13th November though, and despite her emphasis on the minor role she had played, it seems unlikely she would have been left at liberty.

Questioning was extended to cover all those known to have been with Katherine in the Duchess's household, and various members of the Howard clan

⁹⁴ S.P. 1/167/159

⁹⁵ Smith *Tudor Tragedy* pp181-2

⁹⁶ S.P. 1/167/139

⁹⁷ S.P.1/167/139; Smith, *Tudor Tragedy* p. 187; Fraser *Six wives of Henry VIII* p. 350

⁹⁸ The Lady Mary and the Duchess of Richmond were to return to their families (Lady Mary was to go to Prince Edward's household), while special arrangements were made for Anne Basset, because of the 'calamity of her friends', in other words the imprisonment of Lord Lisle.

including Duchess Agnes herself. The Duke of Norfolk managed to distance himself from the rest of his family, and in a conversation with the French ambassador Marillac spoke with tears in his eyes of the king's grief, and the misfortune of his own house.⁹⁹

What this meant for the Howards was seen when several of the family, including the old Duchess, lord William Howard and Lady Bridgewater were imprisoned on charges of misprision of treason, and faced loss of their goods as well.

Before the imprisonment of the Howards, however, Francis Dereham and Thomas Culpeper had suffered the penalty for having loved the queen. Both were found guilty of treason, though in Dereham's case there is no evidence to prove that he had been Katherine's lover after her marriage. Dereham received the full penalty for treason in all its horror, proof perhaps as has been suggested that the king felt a 'special resentment' against him.¹⁰⁰ For Culpeper, more socially important than Dereham, and once the King's friend, the gentler and more honourable death of beheading was used.

Meanwhile Katherine Howard - no longer to be called queen after a proclamation of 22 November- and Lady Rochford remained in prison. Jane suffered some kind of nervous breakdown while in prison. The Spanish ambassador Chapuys noted that the 'dame de Rochefort' had been 'seized with a fit of madness' on the third day of her imprisonment. From time to time she recovered her reason, and the King sent his own physicians to her daily. The reason for this solicitous attention, he added in a way which seems chilling to a modern reader, was that 'He desires her recovery chiefly that he may afterwards have her executed as an example and warning to others.'¹⁰¹

The two women remained in prison for many weeks. Parliament opened on the 16th January, and on the 21st, a Bill of Attainder against the queen was introduced. Katherine's misdeeds were described in some detail, and the role played by Lady Rochford was clearly set out.

[Katherine Howard] hath also synnes that tyme most traytorouslye confederated herself with the Ladye Jane Rocheford wydowe . . . to bring her vicious and abhominable purpose to passe with Thomas Culpeper Esquier . . . [they] met in a secrett and vyle place, and that at an undue hower of a xj a Clocke in the night, and so remayned there with him till three of the Clocke in

⁹⁹ *L.P.* vol.16 no 1342

¹⁰⁰ Fraser, *Six wives of Henry VIII* p. 348

¹⁰¹ *Cal. S.P. Span.* vol. 6i p. 408

the morninge, none being with [them] but that Bawde the ladye Jane Rocheford, by whose meanes Culpeper came thither, and there they all three and at other conferences togyther afterward most falselie and traiterouslye comytted and perpetrated many detestable and adhomynable treasons . . .¹⁰²

In addition to the condemnation of Katherine Howard and Jane Rochford, the act retrospectively justified the condemnation and execution of Dereham and Culpeper, and the imprisonment of the Howards for misprision. The bill also protected the king from the possibility of an unchaste wife in the future, either before or after a royal marriage. King Henry was still feeling the effects of shock and grief at his wife's disloyalty, and to spare him further suffering the bill was given the royal assent by a commission rather than by the king in person.¹⁰³ This was done on 11 February, the day after Katherine had at last been taken to the Tower.

Marillac, writing to Francis I on the day the bill received its assent, reported that the queen was in a state of collapse; 'she weeps, cries and torments herself miserably' and that the execution was expected to be delayed for three or four days so that she could recover and '*penser au faict de sa conscience*'. However, two days later, as the French ambassador wrote in a postscript to his letter, Katherine Howard and Jane Rochford were led out to execution. Marillac and Chapuys both gave quite brief accounts of the event to their masters, presumably retailing the information they had been given by their staffs¹⁰⁴ Katherine was led out first, and according to Marillac she was 'so weak that she could hardly speak', but in a few words she confessed her guilt and said that she deserved to die a hundred deaths for so offending the king who had been so gracious to her. Katherine was then decapitated, and her headless body was covered with a black cloak, and then moved to one side, so that Lady Rochford could take the queen's place. There is some discrepancy about how much Jane spoke on the scaffold. Chapuys wrote 'Neither the queen nor Mme de Rochefort spoke much' whereas Marillac said that Lady Rochford made 'a long discourse of several faults which she had committed in her life'.

However we have another account which may give a more accurate version of events. Otwell Johnson,¹⁰⁵ a London merchant, worked on the staff of Sir John Gage,

¹⁰² 33 Henry VIII c. 21, *Statutes of the Realm* (London 1817) vol. 3 p. 857

¹⁰³ Scarisbrick *Henry VIII* p. 432

¹⁰⁴ *Cal. S.P. Span.* vol. 6i pp. 470-475 (Chapuys); *L.P.* vol. 17 p. 100 (Marillac)

¹⁰⁵ See Barbara Winchester, *Tudor Family Portrait*, (London 1955) for an account of the Johnson brothers. See also chapter eight, below.

Controller of the royal household. One of Gage's duties had been to break the news to Katherine of the time of her execution, and he was much involved with arrangements for the event, as was Otwell. It was also part of Otwell Johnson's duties to witness the execution itself. Writing to his brother John, Otwell gave a description of the scene, concentrating on the final words of the condemned women. He writes as if both said the same things, but it has been suggested that the speech he gives was largely based on that of Lady Rochford.¹⁰⁶ Unlike the ambassadors Otwell had no political motive and was writing a private letter, so it would seem likely that he gave a fairly accurate account of events. Otwell was clearly impressed with the demeanour of the women, particularly what he saw as their sincere repentance for their sins

I se the quene & the Lady of rotcheford suffer wt in the tower [on Monday] whos sowles (I doubt not) be wt god, ffor thay made the moost godly christyans ends, that ever was hard tell of (I thinke) sins the worldes creation, uttering thayer lyvely faeth in the blode of Christe onely, wt wonderfull pacience & costancy to the death, & wt goodly wordes & stedfast contenance they desired all christen people, to take regard unto thayer worthy and just punisshement wt death for thayer offences, agenst god heinously from thayer youth upward, in breaking of his comandements, and also agenst the Kinges Royal maiesty, very daungerously: wherfor thay being justly condempned (as thay sayed) by the lawes of the realme & parlement, to dye, required the people (I say) to take example of them, for amendement of thayer ungodly lyves, & gladly to obey the kinge in all thinges, for whose preservation they did hartely pray, and willed all people so to do comending thayer sowles to god, & earnestly calling for mercy uppon him: whom I besieche to geve us grace, wt suche faeth, hope and charitie at or departing owte of this miserable world, to come to the fruition of his godhed in joy everlasting. Amen.¹⁰⁷

Otwell was himself very godly, a supporter of reform in religion, and can have had little political sympathy with the Howards. Yet his account suggests that he was genuinely convinced of the women's sincere penitence. Whether their repentance was as sincere as he thought, or whether the fear of death had produced a similar result, can hardly be judged by the historian.

According to Chapuys Lady Rochford had 'shewn symptoms of madness until the very moment when they announced to her that she must die.' The possibility that she would be unable to be dealt with appropriately by the law because of her evident madness had been considered at the highest level. Immediately before the Act of

¹⁰⁶ Fraser, *Six wives of Henry VIII* p. 353

¹⁰⁷ S.P. 1/169/32

Attainder of the Queen and Lady Rochford, the Statute Book records a curious act 'for due proces to be had in High Treason in cases of Lunacy or Madnes'. It recognised that the discernment of the difference between real and feigned madness was 'a thinge almoste ympossible to judge or trye' and because of this, in a case of a mad person being charged with high treason, the trial should go ahead in their absence as if in their presence, and the same penalties were to apply. Insanity in fact was not to be a defence in the case of high treason. Despite Chapuys' comments that the King wished Lady Rochford to be cured of her madness so that she could be executed, this special act made it clear that her execution could go ahead whatever her mental state actually was. It should be noted that the act did not name any individuals, but it was certainly directed at Lady Rochford, since it was bound up in the same bundle as the attainder.¹⁰⁸

At the end of her speech Lady Rochford was beheaded, and the two bodies were interred in the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula in the Tower of London, where Anne Boleyn and George Rochford had been buried some six years earlier. As a condemned traitor, Jane Rochford's property was forfeit to the crown. She had a few manors in Norfolk, conveyed to her in 1539 as her belated jointure, including the Boleyn house at Blickling.¹⁰⁹ Some goods which she left there were quickly sold off to Sir James Boleyn, the Earl of Wiltshire's brother and heir, who also acquired Blickling itself¹¹⁰ A small collection of plate, jewels and clothes was confiscated and duly listed, though with no indication of what would become of them. One jewel, 'a tablet of gold wt black, grene and whit enamelled' may perhaps be the 'tablet of gold' Jane Rochford had received from Jane Seymour's jewels.¹¹¹ Finally a quantity of rich bedding was received into the royal wardrobe.¹¹² The most splendid piece was a 'bedd stede of wodd painted & gilt with burnished gold', complete with gold-embroidered white vallances, 'the lorde Rochefordes knottes upon the seames', red and white silk curtains, feather bolsters and down pillows. This would seem to have been a part of lord Rochford's property which his widow had been able to keep

¹⁰⁸ 33 Henry VIII c. 20, *Statutes of the Realm* vol. 3 p. 855-57

¹⁰⁹ *L.P.* vol. 14 no. 867

¹¹⁰ *L.P.* vol. 17 no. 119; Warnicke, *Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, p. 237

¹¹¹ S.P. 1/167/147

¹¹² P.R.O. E. 315/160/104

despite his disgrace. One wonders whether the 'lord Rochefordes knottes' would have been unpicked by the next owner.¹¹³

Lady Rochford has not had a good press. From the Act of Attainder, describing her succinctly as "that Bawde the Lady Jane Rocheford", onward, there have been few good words for her. George Cavendish, in the same long poem where he accused George Rochford of lechery, included Jane Rochford in his gallery of characters. She begins by reminding the reader of her noble parentage, and then says:

I, alas I, that dyd myself inclyne
To spot them all by my owltrage,
Brought up in the court all my yong age,
Withouten bridell of honest measure,
Following my lust and filthy pleasure.
Without respect of any wyfely truthe,
Dredles of God, from grace also exempte
Vicously consuming the tyme of thys my youth;
And when my beauty began to be shent
Not with myn owne harme sufficed or content
Contrary to God, I must it nedes confesse,
Others I entised by ensample of my wretchednes.

There is much more in the same vein, including a characteristically sixteenth century list of examples of good women (Sarah, Rachel, Penelope etc) with a contrasting list of evil ones (Cleopatra, Pasiphae, Messalina). Messalina is described as insatiate, and the same damning word is used of Lady Rochford 'called the woman of vice insaciatt'. Finally, Lady Rochford accepts the justice of her punishment, and prays that God will not exact 'of me a greater vengeance'¹¹⁴.

A century or so after Cavendish, the attitude to Lady Rochford had not softened. Bishop Gilbert Burnet was hardly likely to be sympathetic towards the condoning of adultery, and he did not mince his words about her.

But for the Lady Rochford, every body observed Gods Justice on her; who had the chief hand, both in Queen Anne Boleyns, and her own Husbands death and it now appearing so evidently what sort of Woman she was, it tended much to raise their reputations again, in whose Fall, her spite and other Artifices had so great a hand. She had been a Lady of the Bed-Chamber to the last four Queens' but now it was found how unworthy she was of that trust¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Simon Thurley *The Royal Palaces of Tudor England* (New Haven and London 1993) gives some details of royal beds of this period, pp. 234-238. A list of Jane Rochford's property is given in Appendix 3, pp. 297-299

¹¹⁴ George Cavendish, *Metrical Visions* vol. 2 pp. 72-74

¹¹⁵ Gilbert Burnet, *History of the Reformation* vol. 1 p. 313

By the early nineteenth century Singer (the editor of Cavendish) was prepared to be kinder to Jane, but only because he did not believe that she had stayed with Culpeper and Katherine Howard all night. The queen, he thought, 'was hardly so lost to all sense of shame as to require a witness of her amours'.¹¹⁶ Twentieth century historians, if they have mentioned Jane Rochford at all (and her name is absent from the indices of most of the standard one-volume Tudor histories) have been unsympathetic. She was the queen's 'conniving cousin' whose death contained 'a certain justice'.¹¹⁷ She is 'generally regarded as a jealous, evil-minded woman who deserved her fate'.¹¹⁸ Another writer calls her 'a bird of ill-omen' where English Queens were concerned.¹¹⁹ For Katherine Howard's biographer Lady Rochford was a 'remarkable female' but also 'a pathological meddler with the instincts of a procuress' about whom 'it is charitable to believe that she was insane from the start'.¹²⁰ One historian does call her 'poor Lady Rochford' but in the context of her going 'out of her mind time and again'.¹²¹

So, what should be the judgement? Cavendish's wilder accusations can be dismissed. There is no evidence to suggest that Lady Rochford was herself promiscuous, or even that she had a lover. The evidence that she was largely responsible for the deaths of her husband and Anne Boleyn can surely also be dismissed. Neither the theory of Cromwell's responsibility for Anne's death, nor the theory relating to the significance of Anne's miscarried foetus, give an important role to Lady Rochford. What is important, clearly, is the part she played in Katherine Howard's affair with Culpeper. It has been said that 'there is not a scrap of evidence to indicate an overt act of adultery' between Katherine and Culpeper, and that they were condemned on testimony 'which today would be thrown out of court as totally false and unacceptable'.¹²² Even if that is true, there seems no doubt that Jane Rochford quite willingly stood by while the queen had secret rendezvous with a man who was not her husband, in circumstances which were highly suggestive of adultery.

¹¹⁶ S.W. Singer, editor's notes to *Metrical Visions*, vol 2 p.72 n.3

¹¹⁷ Diarmid MacCulloch, 'The earl of Surrey and the fall of the Howard' in David Starkey, ed., *Rivals in Power* (London 1990) p. 106

¹¹⁸ Byrne, *Lisle Letters* vol. 3 p. 380

¹¹⁹ Fraser, *Six wives of Henry VIII* p. 349

¹²⁰ Smith, *Tudor Tragedy* pp. 167, 170

¹²¹ Winchester, *Tudor Family Portrait* p. 37

¹²² Smith, *op. cit.* p. 190

being committed. Unless she was extremely stupid Jane must have known that this interpretation was likely if the events became known. According to all the testimony we have, however, she made no attempt to stop the queen meeting Culpeper, or even tried to dissuade her from such meetings. Instead she did everything she could to help the lovers. She was a mature, experienced woman, and one moreover with first hand knowledge of the king's wrath. Surely if she had wished she could at least have tried to put the case for caution to Katherine, warned her of the appalling consequences if she was found out. Yet if she had done so, it might be thought this would have been included in her desposition. It also has to be said that the deposition gives no hint of insanity. If Lady Rochford had been noticeably disturbed before her arrest, surely Chapuys who commented on her breakdown, would have made it clear that this was nothing new. The conclusion has to be that even if Lady Rochford was not evil, as earlier historians maintained, and was not mad, as a more recent one has suggested, she was at the very least monumentally foolish.

Chapter Six

Mary, Countess of Northumberland: 'the Lord Steward's daughter'

The long life of Mary Countess of Northumberland was marked with frustration and difficulty. Her arranged, aristocratic marriage went spectacularly awry, and as a sixteenth century woman there was little that she could do about it. Late in her life she was in conflict with new religious laws that she could not accept. Mary's life gives insights into the working of marriage negotiations, the importance of dower, and the attitude towards the old in the Tudor period. Above all, perhaps, it illustrates the dependence of some Tudor women on the men in their families.

Historians have not been kind to Mary, having seen her largely as an appendage to her father or her husband. The failure of her marriage is recorded, but as the failure of her husband's marriage rather than hers. Her attempts to redress the balance of that marriage have led to her being labelled 'neurotic and vengeful' by A.G. Dickens, and called a 'trick' by the nineteenth century historian Paul Friedmann.¹ The question whether she might be justified in seeking for vengeance (if that indeed was her motive) has not been considered. An attempt will be made here to balance the position and in particular evidence about her health, which may be very important but which has been ignored by those historians who have noticed Mary, will be considered

Mary Talbot was the daughter of George, fourth Earl of Shrewsbury, and his first wife Anne Hastings.² Anne married George Talbot before 1481, while they were still children (George, her father's ward, having been born in 1468). There are suggestions if not evidence that their marriage was happy, since George Talbot, dying nearly thirty years after Anne, requested that he be buried with her, and directed that his funeral effigy be flanked by those of both his wives. George and Anne had eleven children, but only four lived to adulthood, Francis, Mary, Elizabeth and Margaret.³

¹ A.G. Dickens, *Clifford letters of the sixteenth century* Surtees Society vol. 172 (Durham 1962) p. 45. Paul Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn: a chapter of English life 1527-1536* (London 1884) p. 159-160

² Anne was the daughter of William first Lord Hastings, friend of Edward IV and executed by Richard III.

³ The birth order of the girls is uncertain. "G.E.C." refers to both Mary and her

Francis, the only surviving son, became the fifth Earl of Shrewsbury on his father's death in 1538. Margaret married Lord Clifford, son of the Earl of Cumberland, but died shortly afterwards. Elizabeth married Lord Dacre of Greystock, and lived until at least 1552. The Talbot siblings were a close, or at least a supportive group. Following the death of Countess Anne, the earl married a Kentish gentlewoman, Elizabeth Walden, and another daughter, Anne, was born, who later became Countess of Pembroke. We know that Mary was in touch with Anne into her old age.⁴

Shrewsbury's three elder daughters were all married to leading members of the northern nobility, part of what George Bernard considers a deliberate strategy by the earl.⁵ This was a strategy of which the King did not approve, and the first set of marriage negotiations with the Earl of Northumberland were abortive, perhaps for this reason. The earliest mentions of Mary occur in correspondence concerning marriage proposals between Shrewsbury and the Duke of Buckingham, who was interested in obtaining Mary for his son Lord Stafford.

Sir Richard Sacheverell, negotiating for the earl, discussed the marriage question at dinner with Buckingham. The duke made it clear that Wolsey would support such an alliance, as would the king. Buckingham in fact offered two marriages: his son and daughter to marry Shrewsbury's daughter and son. Sacheverell gave Shrewsbury a clear hint, saying that Buckingham was "yet in greet favor bothe wt the kinges grace and wt my lord cardynall".⁶ Buckingham thought to tempt the earl with good terms, reminding Shrewsbury that in the first year of the king's reign he had offered his son to him "better chepe by a thousand markes then any other man". It is not clear whether Buckingham had since put up his price, or whether even at a thousand marks discount he was still too expensive. In his reply to Sacheverell, Shrewsbury confided that "i trust wt a litle helpe to mary all my daughters wt that some that he asked wt oone of theyme". He also added that he was simply too deeply

sister Elizabeth Lady Dacre as the fifth daughter, on different occasions. See "G E C." (Cockayne) ed. Vicary Gibbs, *The Complete Peerage* (London 1910-1940) vol. 9 p 721 (Northumberland) and vol. 4 p. 22 (Dacre).

⁴ "G E.C.' *Peerage*, vol.11 pp706-709, George fourth Earl of Shrewsbury. F. Brodhurst ed., "The will of George Talbot, 4th Earl of Shrewsbury', *Derbys. Arch. J.* 31 (1909) pp. 73-88 For relationship with Anne see Mary's will, York Registry Wills, vol.19 B f.511 v.

⁵ G.W. Bernard, *The power of the early Tudor nobility* (London 1985) p. 11

⁶ Lambeth Palace Library Ms. 3206 f.13-16

in debt to the king and others to be able to afford Buckingham's price. In view of later events in Mary Talbot's life, it is clear that at this stage Shrewsbury fully intended to make her dower payment correctly at the appropriate time. At this point though he asked Sacheverell to "make myn excuse unto my said good lord" Buckingham.⁷

Shrewsbury was in fact playing a double game. Though Buckingham's heir would inherit the superior title, it suited Shrewsbury better to make an alliance with the dominant northern magnate the Earl of Northumberland, since Shrewsbury's own interests were primarily northern. At the same time that Sacheverell was talking to Buckingham, Shrewsbury was also carrying out negotiations with Northumberland. Towards the end of May 1516 Thomas Allen, the earl's London agent, reported back to his master a conversation in which Northumberland, asked whether he had decided on his heir's marriage, replied "I have concludit wt my lord of Shrouesbury". On being further asked whether he would bring his son to court, he said he would do so "when he is better lerned & well acoynted wt his wife"⁸.

At this point all these negotiations came to nothing. Fontblanque claimed that there was "a mutual disinclination on the part of those most concerned in the matter" but this is surely to apply hindsight.⁹ There seems to be no suggestion at this stage of any liking or disliking between the young people, and it should be remembered that they were probably hardly more than children. Lord Percy was born around 1502 or 1503, so was no more than 14, the minimum legal age of consent to marriage for a boy. Mary's age is not certain, but there seems to be no suggestion that there was any unusual difference in age between them, so she is unlikely to have been more than sixteen or so at this time, and may well have been younger. (Her mother was still alive in 1506 and her brother Francis was born in 1500.)

⁷ Lambeth Palace Library Ms. 3206 f.11. Having failed in the cross marriages with Shrewsbury, Buckingham married his son Thomas to Ursula Pole, while his daughter Elizabeth was married (disastrously) to Thomas Howard, later third Duke of Norfolk. For Elizabeth, see Barbara J. Harris 'Marriage sixteenth century style' *Journal of Social History* 15 (1981-82)

⁸ Lambeth Palace Library Ms. 3206 f.33. Shrewsbury was aware that Buckingham could sabotage his plans with Northumberland, and commented on the need to stay on good terms with both men. Lambeth Palace Library Ms 3206 f.27

⁹ E B de Fontblanque, *Annals of the House of Percy* (London 1887) vol. 1 p 369

After the apparent collapse of these marriage proposals, Mary disappears from view for a time. We know virtually nothing of her upbringing. It is quite likely that like so many Tudor young ladies she spent time in the household of some other family, though we have no record of this.¹⁰ We do know that at least some of the Talbot children lived at home with their parents since Sacheverell expressed his relief in a letter to his master that Shrewsbury, "my lady and all yor lytelones" had escaped an outbreak of sickness, strongly implying that the children were at home.¹¹ At some point Mary learned to write, since she was able to sign a letter written much later to her brother Francis, in a clear though not elegant italic hand. We can probably assume that she could also read, though there is no positive proof of this. Her will does not mention books, for example. What is likely is that Mary Talbot was given a conventional religious education. Her father Shrewsbury was a supporter of the traditional religious ways, and in her old age Mary's strong support for the Catholic faith caused considerable irritation to her nephew the sixth earl.

Rather more is known about the upbringing of Henry, Lord Percy, who was in due course to become Mary's husband. His father the fifth earl was known as "the Magnificent" and his household book suggests that he lived in grand style, if without quite the financial resources needed to maintain it. In 1512, when young Henry was a mere child, six horses were kept for his personal use, more even than for his father.¹² By 1522 Henry Percy had entered the service of Cardinal Wolsey, where he formed a close friendship with Thomas Arundel. In later letters Percy addressed Arundel as "bedfellow", a term which Hoyle considers reflected intimacy but not a homosexual relationship. At a time when young James Basset was considered exceptional for wanting a bed to himself, the term "bedfellow" probably meant literally that the two young men shared a bed in the Cardinal's great household.¹³

¹⁰ For the placing of children in other households see G. McCracken, "The exchange of children in Tudor England . . ." *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983) pp303-13. McCracken suggests that the child was normally placed into a higher status household than its own, which would limit the choice for an earl's daughter.

¹¹ Lambeth Palace Library Ms 3026 f.16

¹² Paul V Jones, *The Household of a Tudor Nobleman* (Urbana 1917/New York 1970) p 216

¹³ R. W. Hoyle, "Henry Percy 6th earl of Northumberland and the fall of the House of Percy" in G. W. Bernard, ed. *The Tudor Nobility* (Manchester 1992) p.184 n 18. In Henry Percy's father's household the Priests and Gentlemen of the chapel slept two to a bed, while the boys slept in threes. Jones, *Household*, p.226. For

More important than Percy's relationship with Arundel though, was the relationship he formed around 1522 with a young court lady, Sir Thomas Boleyn's daughter Anne. The main source for this relationship is George Cavendish's *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, written many years after the event and with the benefit of hindsight. According to Cavendish the two young people fell in love. He makes no suggestion that the love was one sided, or that the more sophisticated Anne was taking advantage of Henry for her own ends, as was suggested by the nineteenth century historian Friedman who claimed that Anne "used her best arts" on Percy. Ives also claims that Anne was using Henry Percy for her own ends, as part of Thomas Boleyn's strategy regarding the proposed marriage between Anne and James Butler.¹⁴ Whether or not Anne lost her heart to Percy, he seems to have been conquered by her. Some sort of agreement was made between them, secretly and without consulting their parents. Cavendish says "they were insured together, intending to marry" but gives no further details. Chapuys later suggested that the relationship had been consummated, but this was denied by Northumberland himself.¹⁶ Even if Percy and Anne Boleyn had agreed to marry using words in the present tense, it seems unlikely that their relationship was consummated, since as Ives says such a relationship could not have been broken even by the combined might of the King, Wolsey and the earl of Northumberland.¹⁷ According to Cavendish this formidable triumvirate did join forces to end the young love of Henry Percy and Anne Boleyn. Wolsey summoned Percy and lambasted him for his folly in entangling himself with a "foolish girl" who was far from being his equal. He then threatened Percy with the wrath not only of his father but also of the King. Cavendish remembering these events after some thirty years, said that the King was angry because he was already lusting after Anne Boleyn himself. This is probably not the case, (Henry may have been having an affair with Mary Boleyn at this time) and the king is more likely to

James Basset see the *Lisle Letters* vol. 4 no. 1064, and the Lady Lisle chapter above.

¹⁴ Paul Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn: as chapter of English Life 1527-1536* (London 1884) vol 1 p 44

¹⁵ Eric Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, (Oxford 1986) p.82

¹⁶ A promise of marriage was binding if made in the present tense (*per verba de praesenti*) and if made in the future tense (*per verba de futuro*) became binding if followed by consummation. For early modern marriage law see e.g. Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce* (London 1990) p.53. See above pp. 70-71

¹⁷ Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, p. 80

have been annoyed because he was supporting the proposed match between Anne and James Butler, and also perhaps because at this time (1522-23) Anne, daughter of a mere knight (even if granddaughter of a duke), was not considered a suitable match for Northumberland's heir. Certainly Percy, according to Cavendish, emphasised the nobility of Anne's lineage and the fact that their marriage would have involved no disparagement.

The Cardinal having firmly rebuked Percy, sent for Northumberland who gave his son a withering dressing-down, in the presence of some of the Cardinal's household. He threatened to disinherit Percy and as a final insult urged the attendant gentlemen to "tell him his fault when he doth amiss". Cavendish, an eyewitness, makes a fine dramatic narrative of this scene, but again is probably helped by his knowledge of Percy's later life when he has the earl calling his son "a very unthrift waster" and prophesying "thou wilt be the last earl of our house".¹⁸

The earl of Northumberland now revived the earlier agreement with Shrewsbury to see his son safely married off to Mary Talbot. By September 1523 the marriage was being talked about at court, and mentioned in letters by both the Earl of Surrey and Lord Dacre, whose own family was linked by two marriages to the Talbots.¹⁹ Family ties between Dacres and Talbots remained strong and her brother-in-law William Dacre was to show himself a friend to Mary at a time of crisis. The exact date of the marriage between Henry Percy and Mary Talbot is unknown but it was probably in late January or early February 1524. On the 17th December 1523 Shrewsbury told Dacre that he trusted the marriage would "take effect" at the beginning of the next term.²⁰ Fontblanque suggests that Mary was unwilling and had "only yielded to the stern exercise of parental authority".²¹ Whether or not this is true, she must have known that she had no option but to follow her father's will. If

¹⁸ George Cavendish, 'The life and death of Cardinal Wolsey' in R.S. Sylvester and D.P. Harding eds, *Two Early Tudor Lives* (New Haven 1962) pp.32-36; Ives, *op. cit.* pp.77-83

¹⁹ Fontblanque, *Annals of the House of Percy* vol. 1 p. 374; B.L. Add. Ms. 24965 f. 177; for the links between Dacres and Talbots see 'G.E.C.' *Peerage* vol. 11 p.710 (Francis Talbot and Mary Dacre) vol. 4 p.22 (Elizabeth Talbot and William Dacre)

²⁰ B.L. Add. Ms. 24965 f. 83; Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, p.81 places the marriage probably between 14 January and 8 February 1524

²¹ Fontblanque, *Annals*, vol.1 p.385

Henry Percy could not defy his father, surely it would be even harder for Mary to do so. But sixteenth century aristocrats did not look for romantic love in marriage, conventional wisdom being that marriage came first and love, if you were lucky, followed afterwards.²²

An important part of the marriage process was the dowry, the payment made by the bride's father at the time of marriage.²³ This was vital as it was the basis for the jointure provided for the widow by her husband's estate after his death. The dowry payment helped to offset the drain on the estate that a widow might present.²⁴ In some cases - including that of Catherine of Aragon when she married prince Arthur - the bridegroom's father might agree that the dowry payment could be made in instalments. This may have been the case with Mary Talbot, but if it was then curiously not even the first payment seems to have been made. The sum of two thousand five hundred marks was apparently fixed for Mary's dowry, but it was never paid. On the death of the fifth earl of Northumberland in 1527 this sum was recorded by the earl's solicitor as "a debt . . . by my lord of Shrewsbury for the marriage of lord Percy" .²⁵ Later, when Mary was trying to obtain financial support, this failure to pay her dowry was used as a weapon against her. On another occasion, when Shrewsbury was negotiating a marriage between his daughter Anne and Thomas Darcy, grandson of Lord Darcy, detailed figures for the dowry were included, to be paid by instalments.²⁶ Though this marriage did not take place, Shrewsbury clearly accepted the necessity of paying dowry for his daughters. It is possible that the lack of payments for Mary indicates that Northumberland was sufficiently eager for the marriage to turn a blind eye to Shrewsbury's failure to pay immediately, and only when the failure of the marriage became apparent did the debt become contentious.

Following their marriage the young couple seem to have joined the main Northumberland household with only four attendants of their own, two male and two female. Henry Percy was dependent on his father for money, and the earl seems to

²² See chapter two for a discussion of contemporary views on marriage.

²³ See above pp.74-76 for a discussion on dowry

²⁴ Rowena Archer, "Rich old ladies: the problem of late medieval dowagers' in A J Pollard, ed *Property and Politics: essays in late medieval English history* (Gloucester 1984) pp15-35

²⁵ *I.P.* vol 4ii no. 3119

²⁶ *L.P.* vol. 12ii no. 186:40

have kept him short. Late in 1524, wanting to make a show in a tournament at court, he had to borrow from his brother in law Lord Clifford for "my lord my father will do nothing for me but would be glad to have me put to lack".²⁷ Accounts drawn up in 1527 show that the subsistence allowed for Lord and Lady Percy was 13s 4d a week. They had a mere four attendants assigned for their personal staff, who were allowed an additional 18d each. While hardly at starvation level this was not the level of expenditure that the heir to a great title and his wife might have expected. In 1512 the earl had allowed 11s 10d a day for the entertainment of strangers (an average of 57 at 2 1 2d per day), which puts the allowance for his son somewhat in perspective. Lord Percy's stable cost around £28 per year, while Lady Percy's "wardrobe" was estimated at £40. In fairness to the "magnificent earl" it has been said that he died with debts of £17,000, so his reasons for keeping his son on short rations may have been at least partly financial. Henry began his tenure as earl with comparatively modest personal debts of £1,000.²⁸

In 1527 the "magnificent earl" died. Henry, now sixth earl, still dominated by his old master Wolsey, accepted the cardinal's instruction that he should not attend his father's funeral. His appointment as Warden of the Northern and Eastern Marches soon followed, a recognition of the advantages the Percies had in dealing with border lawlessness.

Northumberland also began to deal with the debts he had inherited by selling much of his land holding, concentrating on maintaining the northern estates and alienating those elsewhere in the country. Other lands were given or sold on favourable terms to his friends, including Reynold Carnaby and Thomas Arundel.²⁹

Already Northumberland's health was giving problems. In a somewhat depressed letter written in April 1528 to Arundel he complains of the return of "myn old deses" and also "aswelling at my stomak wt an extrem agoo". He tells Arundel

²⁷ Richard Hoyle, *Fall of the House of Percy* p.185

²⁸ Fontblaque, *Annals* vol.1 p380 citing L.P. vol. 4 ii no. 3378; Jones, *Household of a Tudor Nobleman* p.166. Bean argues that the fifth earl's borrowing was short term and he did not leave a massive debt for his heir. J.M.W. Bean, *The Estates of the Percy Family 1416-1537* (Oxford 1958) p. 142

²⁹ Bean, *Estates of the Percy Family*, p. 146

that his "erthly comfort" rests on him. There would be several similar references to poor health in the following years.³⁰

At some time in late 1528 Mary became pregnant. While staying in her father's house she went into labour, possibly prematurely.³¹ In April 1529 Northumberland wrote to Arundell as follows;

"So yt ys my wyff is brod to bed off a chyld ded, and as I have word from my lord Steward and them abowth her, she look for non other but deth, and if she escap ye ffechysions, wryt plain she cannot continew."³²

There were to be no more children following this miscarriage.

Whatever had gone wrong with the Northumberlands' marriage, the dissension between them became plainly apparent over the summer of 1529. Mary returned from her father's house, having duly escaped the physicians, but returned to a house that was no longer a home. She was still ill, and beset by fears that Henry was poisoning her. She may have written desperate letters to her family expressing those fears. Lord and Lady Dacre (Mary's sister Elizabeth and her husband) sent their servant Thirkeld to see her in the hope of identifying the cause of the problem. It is possible that rumours may have been spreading which clearly the Talbot family would want to quash. Fortuitously Northumberland was away at the time so Thirkeld was able to have confidential discussions with Mary. However when Northumberland found out about Thirkeld's visit he was furious and had Mary shut up under the care of Edward Edgar his auditor and two other servants. In the earl's own words they were to "see her int[er]teyned a great dele better than she hath deserved", but they were not to allow her to see outsiders to repeat her "malicious" accusations against him.

Meanwhile the earl of Shrewsbury, having received news of Mary (probably from Thirkeld), "heryng his daughter to be in some agony" but not yet knowing of

³⁰ P R O S P. 1 47/246

³¹ It is not known if her presence in her father's house was deliberate or accidental. But see Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* p.44 for reference to upper class women returning to their parents' home for their confinements.

³² Fontblanque *Annals* vol. 1 pp. 385-6. Regrettably Fontblanque gave no reference for this letter, and I have been unable to trace the original. The British Library lists of letters between Northumberland and Thomas Arundel do not appear to contain this letter. This is particularly unfortunate as this letter would seem to be the first indication of possible problems in the marriage.

her imprisonment, sent his man Rauff Leche and a priest named Sampson to see Mary to give her his blessing, and no doubt to find out exactly what was going on. Unfortunately for Mary, the earl was now at home. He ordered his servants to deny access to Leche, who was not deterred and demanded to be admitted. When his servants failed to deter Rauff Leche, Northumberland himself took over, saying he would not allow anyone from her father to see Mary for her to "invent moe malicious imaginacions of untrithe". Rauff Leche having returned to his master, is likely to have described Northumberland's behaviour to Shrewsbury. It appears that Shrewsbury informed the Duke of Norfolk, and Norfolk in turn may have demanded an explanation from Northumberland. Certainly Norfolk raised the matter with Lord Dacre. Our version of the events derives from Northumberland's own furious letter to Norfolk, justifying his position, and repeatedly using the word 'malicious'. It appears from this letter that there had been previous trouble between earl and countess: Northumberland talks of 'hir former dealyng to your grace not unknowen', and suggests that this might have been 'very wel amendyt'.³³ This he claims is the reason for keeping her under guard. Northumberland then raised the matter of the unpaid dower. He emphasised "the kyndnes of me whiche tooke nothyng wt his daughter" and considered that Shrewsbury by his apparent criticism impugned his honour. Northumberland then suggested that if Shrewsbury "thought his daughter not so interteyned as he wold and she beyng in feere of poysonyng" he could send for her. Northumberland said that he would "send her over unto hym with a reasonable fynding for eschewing of more unconueniences for peremptoryly her actes so openly manyfest". His anger rose again as he added "I woll never com in hir company As longe as I lyved"

Northumberland was provoked into writing his long descriptive letter to Norfolk (on the 3rd of September 1529) by a report he had received that Norfolk had asked Dacre whether Mary had the "fallyng sekenes". If she did not, the Duke had said, he would take Mary's part. Northumberland assured Norfolk that this would be "not a litle to my dyscomforth considering the special affyaunces and trust I have in yor grace", and did not actually answer the question about the falling sickness.

³³ Hoyle suggests that Mary had been spying on Northumberland on Norfolk's behalf. This, if true, could not have improved their relationship. Hoyle, 'The Fall of the House of Percy' p. 182

After this outburst of anger, Northumberland finished his letter quite calmly discussing his problems as Warden of the Marches.³⁴

So what had gone wrong? Here we are in the realms of speculation. A few possible issues may be raised. Had Mary been unfaithful, and was the miscarried child a bastard? No doubt infidelity was possible in a great household, as Catherine Howard's teenaged promiscuity would be possible in a similar household a few years later. Northumberland would have been away from home a great deal pursuing his duties as Warden. The letter to Norfolk shows his sensitivity with regard to his honour. Would he have kept quiet if he had been cuckolded, or would he have denounced Mary without hesitation?

Another possibility is that Mary's apparently neurotic behaviour derived from physical or mental disease, perhaps as the result of her abortive pregnancy. An acute case of puerperal psychosis (post-natal depression) might explain her symptoms, but this could be expected to begin much sooner than six months after her delivery. There are however medical conditions such as Sheehan's Syndrome which could have caused her stillbirth followed by a physical decline, which might account for the reference to the falling sickness. Sheehan's Syndrome would involve a premature menopause and symptoms of ageing, but would not rule out living to old age.³⁵ The question of physical disease returns us to the curious reference to the falling sickness. Rumours to this effect had apparently been going the rounds, or Norfolk would not have asked Mary's brother in law, Dacre about it.

The falling sickness, or epilepsy, was viewed with fear in the early modern period. In ancient times it had been called 'the sacred disease' but with Christianity it had on the contrary come to be associated with demonic possession. Both physicians and the church believed that possession could manifest itself in epileptic fits, though they were also aware that epilepsy could be caused by a purely physical disease.³⁶ This doubt, and the nature of the disease, made epilepsy shameful and it is hardly surprising that Northumberland would resent the suggestion that his wife was epileptic. If Mary did suffer from the falling sickness, this might explain her

³⁴ B.L. Cotton Caligula B.I f.136-136v. (formerly f.127)

³⁵ I am grateful to Mr David J. Thomas, F.R.C.S., F.R.C.O.G. for discussion on possible gynaecological causes for Mary's problems.

³⁶ Owsei Temkin, *The Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy* (Baltimore/London 2nd edition 1971) pp. 19, 138-139

apparently neurotic behaviour and her paranoia about her husband poisoning her. It might well be imagined that Mary, locked into an unhappy marriage (and indeed perhaps literally locked up) suffering the grief and the physical after effects of a still birth, perhaps having some type of fits, might have accused Northumberland who may simply have been the nearest target. Perhaps she really believed that he was poisoning her, since this could seem to be the logical explanation of her own health problems. One reference to the falling sickness does not in itself prove that Mary was epileptic, but as will be seen there was also a tantalising reference to possession made in her old age.³⁷ Moreover this would provide an explanation for the fact that Mary never remarried after Northumberland's death, and spent much of her later life living quietly in the country

A third solution to the problem (which does not rule out the possibility of epilepsy) may simply be that the unhappy marriage, combined with the after effects of her stillbirth, had finally proved too much for Mary. There may have been constant quarrels in which she made wild accusations about Henry poisoning her, and he may in turn have taunted her over the lack of a dowry. It is interesting that the Talbot family clearly did not reject Mary, but equally clearly they wanted to get to the root of the problem as well as wanting to comfort her. This support from the Talbots would seem to rule out infidelity on Mary's part as the cause of the marriage breakdown

There is some suggestion that even if Mary moved out at this stage, she and Northumberland came together again later. Certainly Shrewsbury and Northumberland, two of the leading nobles in the north, continued to cooperate at the political level. In November 1530 for instance both were involved in the final journey of Cardinal Wolsey.³⁸ At least officially, the Northumberland marriage continued. Mary's name was joined with the earl's in a licence to alienate some of the Percy lands in Kent in April 1531. They may still have been living together, but probably without affection. In 1532, writing to his brother-in-law Clifford, husband of his sister Margaret, Northumberland told them that apart from the King, they were the people

³⁷ See below pp. 215-216

³⁸ Cavendish, *Life of Wolsey* pp156-168. Northumberland was given the task of arresting his former master, while Shrewsbury entertained the Cardinal at Sheffield on his journey southwards.

in the world he would "faynest " see.³⁹ This together with his considerable affection for Thomas Arundel, emphasises the lack of love in his marriage.

In July 1532, probably around the time this letter was written, Mary and Northumberland had another, dramatic quarrel.⁴⁰ As harsh words were exchanged between them, the furious Northumberland told his wife that she was not his wife at all, because he had earlier made a legally binding contract of marriage with Anne Boleyn. Mary would have had to take him seriously. It was not so long after all since the King himself had told his wife of nearly twenty years standing that their marriage was not legal because of her previous marriage to his brother. The circumstances of course were very different, and the king had not yet succeeded in annulling his marriage. But surely Mary must have known a surge of hope that the end of her hated union with Northumberland might be in sight.⁴¹ At the same time, at least according to Friedmann, she saw a chance of damaging the career of the favourite, Anne Boleyn⁴² It is unlikely that Mary will have felt any affection for Anne, especially if her husband hinted that he still loved her. The Earl of Shrewsbury was scrupulously loyal to the King, but he also 'showed sincere affection for the queen' (Catherine)⁴³ Mary had a family tradition of support for Catherine of Aragon as well as her own very personal reasons for disliking Anne Boleyn. The exposure of the pre-contract with Northumberland could bring an end to the favourite's hopes of marrying the king, as well as release Mary from her own bondage.

Divorce in the modern sense was not possible in sixteenth century England.⁴⁴ Divorce *ab mensa et thoro*, akin to a modern legal separation, did not permit either party to remarry, and while useless for Northumberland, who needed an heir, would have brought no real advantage to Mary either. However, the existence of a binding marriage contract, by *verba de presenti*, could invalidate a later marriage even if consummated. Most of the very few requests for dissolution of marriage brought

³⁹ A G. Dickens, *Clifford Letters* no. 34

⁴⁰ Vienna, Haus- und Staatsarchiv, England Korrespondenz Karton 5, Konvolut 1532, ff.81-82; Ives, *Anne Boleyn* p. 207; Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn* vol. 1 pp. 159-160

⁴¹ Eric Ives suggests that Mary saw this revelation as a way out of her troubled marriage. Ives op. cit. p207

⁴² Friedmann, *Anne Boleyn* vol. 1 pp. 159-160

⁴³ Bernard, *Power of the Tudor Nobility* p.50

⁴⁴ See above pp. 63-64

before the church courts related to such circumstances, and such an annulment allowed the aggrieved partner to marry again quite legally.⁴⁵ This may have been what Mary was hoping for, or she may simply have been defending her position. Northumberland's revelation had left her in an ambiguous and potentially very damaging situation, neither maid, wife nor widow.

Mary wrote to her father describing the quarrel, and asked him to pass the news on to the king. The worried Shrewsbury, aware of the enormous political danger of this situation, instead showed the letter to the Duke of Norfolk. Norfolk in his turn went not to the king but to his niece Anne Boleyn herself. The favourite responded by taking direct action, handing Mary's letter to the king, and demanding an investigation. Northumberland was sent for (Dickens believes that this was when he wrote the letter expressing his desire to see Clifford) and made to explain himself before the archbishops of Canterbury and York. On oath, in the presence of Norfolk and the king's cannon lawyers he swore on the blessed sacrament and on his salvation that no such pre-contract with Anne Boleyn existed. Was he telling the truth now, or had he told the truth to Mary? If he had told the truth to Mary, it is understandable that he hesitated to repeat this to the archbishops. By mid 1532 Anne Boleyn was clearly established as King Henry's Lady, though there was still no certainty if or when they would marry. To offend her would be by extension to offend the king, and Northumberland would wish to avoid that. On the other hand, would he tell a lie on the blessed sacrament? If Northumberland was telling the truth this time, as seems most likely, he must have been lying to Mary, or perhaps simply indulging in exaggeration without thinking of the consequences. Whatever the truth of the matter, the King accepted Northumberland's word, and no more was heard about the pre-contract with Anne Boleyn until interest in the allegations was revived in 1536 with the collapse of the royal marriage.

With the separation of the earl and countess of Northumberland now an accepted fact, Mary returned to the care of her family. Arrangements seem to have been made that Northumberland would pay Shrewsbury 200 marks a year for Mary's finding, but no money was actually sent, perhaps partly because of the earl's

⁴⁵ Houlbrooke, *The English Family* p.115

continuing financial difficulties.⁴⁶ He had sold or otherwise alienated more lands, especially those not in the Percy heartlands.

Northumberland now began to worry about the future. On 2nd February 1535 he wrote to Cromwell - his old colleague from Wolsey's household- telling him of his thoughts.⁴⁷ "I am visit contynewally with sycknese" he complained and added "my wyff & I ar not lykly to come to gether" showing that by this time their separation was complete. The king, he said, had promised him licence to appoint any of his family, bearing the name of Percy, as his heir. However, "perceyvynge the debylytey and unnaturalnes in those of my name" (here Northumberland had started to write "blood", changed his mind and written "name" instead) he had decided to ignore the claims of his family. Instead "I . . . have determyned fynally . . . to make his grace myn heyr". Northumberland had two younger but adult brothers, Thomas and Ingram or Ingelram, and he was thus disinheriting them.

Northumberland's extraordinary decision to make the King his heir, and disinherit his natural heirs, has caused much interest among historians. Hoyle suggested that the dispute between Sir Thomas Percy and Northumberland's favourite Sir Raynold Carnaby led to the decision to disinherit Thomas. Certainly Northumberland had given considerable lands and favours to Carnaby, and Thomas Percy had been angered by this. Bernard considered that Northumberland's action in leaving his lands to the king "had possibly [been] done to thwart his wife". Fletcher believed that Northumberland endured the "appalling dilemma of the great magnate faced with a suspicious master" and made the King his heir to escape this.⁴⁸

Thwarting Mary may have played a part in the earl's plans, though provision was made for her in the initial agreements. As a widow she would have been entitled to the usual third of Northumberland's estates for life, and the provision made for her was much less than this. A list of "Devices" drawn up in March 1535 proposed a settlement on the earl after his lands were transferred to the king. These included an annual payment to Mary "in consideracon of discharge of her dower" of 200 marks during the earl's life, and £200 after his death.⁴⁹ Even after he had alienated a

⁴⁶ P.R/O. S.P. 1/115/188

⁴⁷ B.L. Egerton Mss. 2603 f.22

⁴⁸ Hoyle, *Fall of the House of Percy* p.196; Bernard, *Power of the Early Tudor Nobility* p. 153; Anthony Fletcher, *Tudor Rebellions* (3rd ed. London 1983) p. 32

⁴⁹ P.R.O. S.P. 1/91/74-75

considerable portion of his estates, a list drawn up around the time of his death shows that his remaining lands and other income were worth about £3876 per annum. A settlement of only £200 a year therefore was hardly generous.⁵⁰

By early 1536 Shrewsbury was becoming worried about his daughter's financial position particularly in view of the likely transfer of the Percy lands to the king. In February he complained to Cromwell that Mary had been with him more than two years and he had not received a penny, despite Northumberland's having promised 200 marks a year for her finding. Shrewsbury asked Cromwell to give his help to ensure that his daughter had a "resonable porcon of my said lord duryng his lyf to lyf upon".⁵¹ By March the statute regarding Northumberland's lands was due to be enacted, and Shrewsbury increased his efforts on Mary's behalf. He wrote on consecutive days to the king and Cromwell. Shrewsbury, now an old man, had been ill, and he first thanked the king for sending Doctor Butts to attend upon him, before begging the king to be "gracyouse souveraigne lorde" to Lady Northumberland "my poore daughter whom it pleased my lorde of Northuberlande that nowe is to marrye and take to wyf". He feared that the act referring to Northumberland's lands might be an "occaseyon to defeate her of her lyvyng", and asked the king to ensure that she might be "entytled to have as myche as is according to yor lawes or elles syche a resonable porcon of the same as may please yow". He begged the king not to give his royal assent to the act until such provision for Mary had been made.⁵² In his letter to Cromwell he quoted the law, saying that his daughter was entitled to "some dower of all suche landes as my seide lord hath ben seased of sythe the tyme of the espousalls betwyxt them". He added that his daughter would be utterly undone if the act passed without provision for her, "haveing no joynture nor oder lyving".⁵³

Shrewsbury's pleading seemed to bring results. The act which transferred Northumberland's lands to the king made specific provision for Mary. The earl was given the right to make a jointure for his wife of the clear yearly value of five hundred marks, while a special clause made clear that nothing in the act should be "hurtfull or p'judycyall" to Mary concerning any right or title she had for her "dowre" of the earl's

⁵⁰ *L.P.* Vol. 12ii no.19:2

⁵¹ P.R.O. S.P. 1/115/188

⁵² P.R.O. S.P. 1/102/201

⁵³ P.R.O. S.P. 1/102/203 Shrewsbury emphasised the importance of his letter by using his heir Francis as the messenger.

possessions. Provision was also made to protect the rights of Northumberland's mother, Countess Katherine. She was granted an annual income of £413 6s 8d, from a list of named manors and lordships, in recompence of her jointure and dower.⁵⁴

1536 was of course a year of high drama for the king, and the events of that year touched the earl of Northumberland closely. On 2nd May Anne Boleyn was accused of adultery. As the evidence was piled up against the queen, the likely verdict became obvious. For the sake of Henry's *amour propre* however the idea of a divorce between himself and the queen was mooted, to take place before her final punishment. Northumberland heard rumours of this, and that his romance with Anne Boleyn was again being remembered. On Saturday 13th May, before Anne's trial began, he wrote to Cromwell reminding him that he had sworn before the archbishops in 1532 that there had been no precontract. Now he repeated "assuring you, Mr Secretary, by the said oath and blessed body which affore I received, and hereafter intend to receive, that the same may be to my damnation, if ever there were any contracte, or promise of marriage, between her and me." ⁵⁵

Northumberland deserves some pity. He was estranged from his wife and his brothers, possibly also from his mother. The woman he had once loved faced charges of treasonable adultery and incest. He was in a situation where either answer to the question could be the wrong one. The king wanted him to admit that he had been legally contracted to Anne because this would ease the king's own progress in getting rid of the queen. At the same time if Northumberland did admit this now, the question would certainly be, why did he deny it in 1532? Northumberland could easily find himself facing a charge of treason, or at least misprision of treason for concealing what he knew about Anne. In the circumstances it seems likely that Northumberland told the truth. Even so neither Chapuys nor the writer of an unsigned Spanish paper seemed to believe him. While Chapuys considered that it would have been more decent and honest to declare the royal marriage invalid on the grounds that Anne had been married to another man still alive, that is

⁵⁴ *Statutes of the Realm* (London 1817) vol. 3 pp. 611-619: 27 Henry VIII cap. 47

⁵⁵ T.B. Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials . . .* (London 1816) vol. 1, p.426; *L.P.* vol. 10 no. 864: Gilbert Burnet in his *History of the Reformation* (2nd ed. London 1681) book 3 p. 203 implied that Northumberland took his oath about the marriage contract in 1536.

Northumberland,⁵⁶ the unknown Spanish writer claimed that there were witnesses "all perfectly agreeing together" that nine years before the queen had been married to, and consummated matrimony with the earl of "Nottemberlan".⁵⁷ In view of all this anxiety it is hardly surprising that the sickly Northumberland collapsed at the end of Anne's trial, though he gave his verdict against her.⁵⁸

The death of the queen he had once loved was not the end of Northumberland's troubles in 1536. The great northern rebellion, the Pilgrimage of Grace, touched him closely. His brothers Thomas and Ingram, encouraged perhaps by their anger at being disinherited, like many other northern gentry were swept up by the momentum generated by Aske and his supporters and joined the rebellion. Their mother Countess Katherine supported them. The earl himself, depressed and physically ill again, stayed at Wressell castle and tried to avoid committing himself. He had after all been the King's loyal servant, and rebellion for an earl of Northumberland, the king's Warden of the marches, would be an appallingly large step to take. It is tempting to say he "skulked" at Wressell but this would perhaps be uncharitable. Certainly his ill health was genuine. The commons in the field had been heard to threaten to kill the earl and give his title to Sir Thomas. Northumberland's response was "he cared not, he could die but once, let them strike off his head and rid him of much pain."⁵⁹ While the earl languished at Wressell Aske came to him, hoping for his support. The two men made terms, with Aske having the upper hand. The earl had little choice but to allow Aske to take over the castle and send him under escort to York. According to Fontblanque, the earl's enemies accused him of surrendering the castle treasonably. The sources of this "calumny", said Fontblanque, were the lords Shrewsbury and Dacre, the countess's partisans. While it might not be reasonable to call Northumberland a traitor, his position was certainly compromised.⁶⁰

Shrewsbury, one of the king's commanders in the field against the rebels, spared some time from his responsibilities to think about Mary's problems. On

⁵⁶ *Cal. S. P. Spanish* vol. 5 ii p. 199

⁵⁷ *loc. cit.* p.136

⁵⁸ Ives, *Anne Boleyn* p. 388. See Ives, *op. cit.* chapters 16 and 17 for the building up of the case against Anne, her trial and execution.

⁵⁹ Madeleine H. Dodds and Ruth Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace 1536-1537 and the Exeter Conspiracy 1538* (London 1915/1971) p. 284

⁶⁰ Dodds, *loc. cit.* ; Fontblanque, *Annals* vol.1 pp. 456-457

the 5th of November he wrote the ailing Northumberland a somewhat curt letter reminding him of the promise Northumberland had made to Lord Francis Talbot and "master Holmes" that he would send 200 marks yearly for Mary's finding. Shrewsbury reminded his son in law that "I hathe not receyved oon penny towards her fyndyng but only suche stuffe as yor lordship sent unto her". He asked therefore that Northumberland would give his chaplain John Moreton the bearer, 300 marks, or at least make him a fair assignment to give him undelayed payment. Evidently Northumberland had made an assignment out of his revenues the previous year, but it was "receyved to yor use" before Shrewsbury could get his hands on it. (This may reflect Aske's comments about the shortage of coin in the north. No doubt Northumberland's agents were not prepared to send good money on to Shrewsbury when they could use it to pay their master's expenses locally.)⁶¹

Just before John Moreton reached Wressell with the letter, he was overtaken by Aske's men who arrested him and took him to the rebel leader. Moreton "comyned a good season" with Aske before he was released. On the twelfth of November Shrewsbury wrote to the king describing this incident as well as giving the king further news of the progress of the rebellion. Moreton was then sent as bearer to the king, carrying in addition a copy of Shrewsbury's letter to Northumberland. Moreton would be able to give up to date intelligence from the rebel camp, and also reassure the king about the innocence of his master's correspondence with Northumberland. Shrewsbury might have saved his efforts and avoided the risk to his reputation, since in his reply, Northumberland said that since the countess's dower remained unpaid, Shrewsbury had no grounds for complaint about the non-payment of the allowance.⁶³

Northumberland managed to avoid actual commitment to the rebellion, though as early as June 1535 Chapuys had questioned the degree of his support for the king and his ministers.⁶⁴ His brothers Thomas and Ingram Percy however were

⁶¹ P R O S P 1/111/78; For Aske's comments on the shortage of coin, see Fletcher, *Tudor Rebellions*, p. 114

⁶² This suggests that Shrewsbury was a little nervous that his correspondence with his son-in-law might come under suspicion since Northumberland's position was ambiguous, and Moreton had spent longer than might be strictly necessary with the rebels.

⁶³ P.R.O. S.P. 1/111/76; Fontblanque, *Annals*, vol.1 pp. 456-457

⁶⁴ *Cal. S. P. Spanish* vol. 5ii p. 354

deeply involved, and paid the penalty for their treason, leaving the childless Northumberland indeed likely to be the last earl of his house. Northumberland's mother was also arrested⁶⁵ but unlike her sons, emerged comparatively undamaged from the rebellion, and took care to remain on good terms with Cromwell, paying him a regular annuity.⁶⁶ Cromwell repaid her by helping her to retrieve her lands and goods when the Percy estates were taken over by the King.⁶⁷

By June 1537 Northumberland was mortally ill. He had surrendered the wardenship by the 12th March, and agreed new terms with the king for the transfer of his lands. On 3rd June he told Cromwell that he accepted an unconditional surrender of his inheritance, and hoped that the king would be gracious enough to allow his servants to enjoy those leases, annuities and fees he had given them. He made no mention of any allowance for his wife⁶⁸. On the 29th June the priest Richard Layton visiting Northumberland in response to a request made five days before, described the dying earl, who was "languens in extremis", his sight and speech gone, though his memory was still functioning. His stomach was hugely swollen and his colour "yellow as saffron". He had no money and had managed only by borrowing. Layton thought he would live no more than another twenty four hours and indeed he was dead by the following day.⁶⁹ His funeral took place immediately, at the local church at Hackney. The funeral was comparatively simple, certainly for a great earl. It has been suggested that this was due to manipulation by the king, using noble funerals to emphasise his power over the nobility. Hoyle however suggests the funeral arrangements, including his burial in the churchyard rather than the church, may reflect Northumberland's own wishes.⁷⁰

Mary was free of her (perhaps hated) husband at last. No doubt she felt relief or even joy at this. But in practical terms it will have made little difference to her

⁶⁵ Sir Brian Hastings who arrested the old countess was surprised by what he considered the paucity of her goods, and described her as 'a woman in discretion but onli in prayer'. P.R.O. E. 36/119/76

⁶⁶ *L.P.* vol 13 no. 127; P.R.O. E. 36/256/35

⁶⁷ *L.P.* vol. 12ii no 955

⁶⁸ *L.P.* vol. 12 ii no 19

⁶⁹ *L.P.* vol. 12ii no 165

⁷⁰ Hoyle, *The Fall of the House of Percy*, p. 200; G. Broce and R. Wunderli, 'The funeral of Henry Percy, 6th earl of Northumberland' *Albion* 22 (1990) pp. 199-215

position. The remarriage of widows was commonplace, though society was somewhat ambivalent about it.⁷¹ A widow though was most attractive to a new husband if she was rich, or at least young and pretty. Mary unfortunately was far from rich, having no money apart from what her father allowed her. Since he had failed to pay her dower the first time round, for a marriage which he wanted, it seems unlikely that Shrewsbury would be generous the second time around. Nor was Mary particularly young. Though Northumberland himself had called her "a young woman" in 1535, she is likely to have been at the least thirty, and more likely thirty-five, at this time. Moreover there was no proof of her fertility. She had had only one abortive pregnancy, and this may have left her barren. She may of course have been pretty, but even if she was good looking as a girl, her youthful bloom may have been fading by now. Moreover there may still have been rumours about her health. On the positive side, Mary may not have wished to remarry. Her experience of marriage had been far from rewarding, and it can be argued that the best thing for a woman to be in the sixteenth century was a widow.⁷² The one thing that a widow needed to enjoy life, was of course money.

The king's takeover of Northumberland's lands had left Mary with nothing. Despite the provision in the statute for allowing a jointure of 500 marks to be made, nothing had been arranged. The earl of Shrewsbury now revived his campaign to get a settlement for Mary, this time directly from the King. In October 1537, from his sick bed, he asked Cromwell to intercede with the king on Mary's behalf, again reminding the Lord Privy Seal that she should be entitled to a third part of the lands, specifically of those which Northumberland had "in his possession of a state of enheretaynce" at the time of their spousalls.⁷³

As tended to be the case with such matters, the attempt to get a settlement for Mary dragged on and on. Over the next six months there were several appeals from Shrewsbury, both to Cromwell and to the King himself, on the countess's behalf.⁷⁴ At last, in May 1538, progress seemed to be made. Moreton wrote to inform Shrewsbury that the Lord Chancellor looked with favour on Mary's appeal, and

⁷¹ B J. Todd, 'The re-marrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered' in Mary Prior ed., *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London 1985)

⁷² See above p. 78 for a discussion on the rights of widows

⁷³ P.R.O. S.P. 1/126/24

⁷⁴ *L.P.* vol. 13 nos. 96, 276, 451, 452

thought she should be given support from Northumberland's lands.⁷⁵ A few days later he reported a further favourable meeting. The Chancellor said that all those who had been subpoenaed to appear regarding the Northumberland lands would be ordered to remain until he had spoken to them, to try to bring a swift end to the case.⁷⁶ After another week, when still nothing had been done, Moreton went to see the Lord Chancellor again, in chancery, and "moved his good lordship to have in his remembrance that no answer was made unto my lady of northublands byll". The Lord Chancellor told Moreton that he would command that those who had appeared should not depart until they had spoken to him "to the intente he myght exhorte them to come unto some good and short ende wt out any ferther processe in that byhalf."

Despite this assurance nothing much was done, though lawyers continued to discuss the problem. By early 1539 still nothing had happened. In a letter probably written in January 1539 Edward Hatfield assured Earl Francis that the lawyers would "do the best that in [them] lyeth"⁷⁸

On the 26th July 1538 George, fourth earl of Shrewsbury, died aged seventy. The previous summer he had written a long and detailed will, making provision for the repose of his soul, his funeral and funerary monument, and the disposal of his property. He was generous with gifts of his chattels to his widow Elizabeth, his heir Francis, and his youngest daughter Anne.⁷⁹ There were smaller, more nominal legacies for his other children. To "my lady of Northumberland my daughter" he bequeathed "one chaine of gold wt white and redde enamell. Item one standing cupp of silver and gilte wt a cover of the Kynges newe yers gifte and also one cup of assay." At the end of his will after making provision for lights and prayers, paying wages to his servants and dole to the poor, he remembered the countess again. He gave instructions to his heir Francis that if the Countess of Northumberland had not been granted an "honourable lyvyng" from her late husband's lands:

"That then my said sonne ffraunces and his heires shall geve and finde unto the said Countes of Northumberland, meate, drincke, apparell, and other fyndyng during hir life naturall or unto suche tyme as she shalhave som landys,

⁷⁵ G R. Batho, *Talbot Papers* p. 5

⁷⁶ *L.P.* vol. 13 no.989

⁷⁷ Lambeth Palace Library Ms. 3206 f.39

⁷⁸ Lambeth Palace Library Ms. 3206 f.55

⁷⁹ Anne was probably still living with her parents at this time. Her husband Peter Compton was Shrewsbury's ward.

tenements, rentis or annuyties whiche shalbe to hir an honorable lyving and fynding." ⁸⁰

There is little information about Mary's life in the years immediately after her father's death. She may have paid a fee to Cromwell as her mother in law did.⁸¹ Though Cromwell in the end did little for Mary, the Shrewsbury family lawyers continued to argue her case. At last on Ascension Day 1542 Mary herself had an audience with the King at Greenwich. She begged him most humbly to listen to her suit since she had no living from her husband's lands. The king, in the words of Robert Swyfte the Talbot agent, heard her "verygentylle", and bowed down on his staff to answer her. (Presumably she was kneeling in the royal presence.) But the king's words were less than gentle. "Madame how can your ladyshyppe dissir any lyffynge of yor husbandes landes seying yor ffather gauffe no money to yor husband in maryage wt yor ladyshype." He added that he was surprised that "my lord yor father beyng so gret a wysse man as he was wolde see no dyrectyon taken in this mater in his time " This is of course hardly fair on Shrewsbury who had been endeavouring to secure an allowance for Mary from 1535 until his death, but it does further emphasise how the lack of a dower payment had been the cause of so much difficulty. Again it makes the omission of the payment in the first place seem almost incomprehensible. At least the king did not dismiss the matter out of hand, asking the Bishop of Durham and Sir Anthony Browne who were in attendance, to take Lady Northumberland's bill and consider the case. Swyfte hoped when he wrote to Earl Francis to get an answer the following day.⁸²

Whether or not Bishop Tunstal and Browne saw Swyfte on that Friday we do not know. If they did it was likely to have been to put Mary off yet again. It was not until nearly a year later that Mary finally received a payment from the crown, an annuity of a mere 100 marks from the Court of Augmentations.⁸³ This was at least

⁸⁰ F. Brodhurst ed., 'The will of George Talbot, 4th earl of Shrewsbury' *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 31 (1909) 73-88

⁸¹ P.R.O. E. 36/256/35 Cromwell's account books record payments from "my lady Northumberland" as well as from the "old lady of Northumberland" but it is impossible to tell whether two different women are meant here. The clerk may simply have been confused and sometimes omitted the word "old".

⁸² Lambeth Palace Library Ms 695 f. 73

⁸³ *L.P.* vol. 18i no 982; For payments see e.g. *L.P.*, vol. 19i no. 368, vol. 20i no 577, vol. 21 i no 643, vol. 21 ii no 775.

regularly paid over the next few years.⁸⁴ Until 1549 the annuity was Mary's only income apart from anything she might have received from the Talbots. In January 1549 her brother earl Francis became a privy councillor for the first time,⁸⁵ and this may have played a part in the grant to her on 13th April of a parcel of rectories valued at £200. The following year Francis was granted the reversion of these rectories, together with the manor of Kimberworth.⁸⁶

Mary's next attempt to gain financial assistance was more successful. In November 1555 Mary, already an old woman by the standards of the day, attended the court of Queen Mary. She was graciously received by the queen in her privy closet, where she presented her "bill of peticione". Despite some contrary claims by historians, it is likely that Mary was petitioning merely for a further payment in lieu of her jointure, and not on behalf of the Percies.⁸⁷ Thomas Percy (nephew of Mary's husband) was not reinstated for nearly two more years, and then in response to the need for a northern magnate with a strong local affinity.⁸⁸ If as is suggested here, Mary was petitioning for herself, she was much more successful than she had been previously. Only six weeks after her interview with the queen, Mary received a substantial grant of former Percy manors including Catton, Topcliffe and Spofforth, worth £322 17s 9 1 2d. That meant a gain of £300 clear to Mary, since she had to pay rent of £22 17s 9 1 2d.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Having awarded the annuity, the crown was swift to claw some of it back when Mary received a demand to make a payment for "the loan' for the war with France, together with other countesses who were "ladies widows'. *L.P.* vol. 19i no 1032 5

⁸⁵ Bernard, *Power of the Tudor Nobility* p. 60

⁸⁶ *Cal. Pat. Rolls Edward VI* vol. 4 no. 407; Meredith ed. *Arundel Mss at Sheffield* p. 114

⁸⁷ According to G.R.Batho, Mary was petitioning to restore 'her son' Thomas Percy to the title and lands of the earldom of Northumberland. G. R. Batho, ed. *Calendar of the Shrewsbury and Talbot Papers in the College of Arms* (London 1971) vol. 2 p. 325. The same general point (though not the reference to 'her son') is made by P.G. Boscher, *Politics Administration and Diplomacy: the Anglo Scottish Border 1550-1560* (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Durham University 1985) pp. 288-289. However it seems unlikely that Mary should take this action on behalf of the Percies when for years she had relied on her own family, not the Percies. Paul Boscher confirmed in a personal communication that he had followed Batho on this point and agreed that other interpretations might be possible.

⁸⁸ Boscher, *op. cit.* p. 287

⁸⁹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls Philip and Mary* vol. 3 p. 168

Two days after her interview with the queen, Mary described the event to her brother Earl Francis ,⁹⁰ She told him that the queen had given her 'verri good & comfortable wurd', and had a long discussion with her about the earl's health. Lady Northumberland hoped for 'the better success in my busynes' at the queen's hands, but does not make the nature of that 'busynes' clear. This seems to be the only letter of Lady Northumberland's to survive, and for her biographer it is frustrating that it reveals so little personal information. The style is formal though Mary does sign herself 'yor l[ordship's] loving suster'. The only suggestion of emotion is that Mary comments that until now she has had no success in her business at all except for a hearing of her bill. As the only extant letter of Mary's however the holograph signature to the letter confirms that Mary could write.

Mary now had an income of £566 13s 4d clear, which was a reasonable sum though still nothing like the £1250 or so she would have been entitled to as a third of Northumberland's income. It was made clear in the patent of 31st December 1555 that this was the last money she would get from the crown 'in full satisfaction of all the dower of right'.⁹¹ It was also emphasised that she only had a life interest in the Yorkshire manors, for in August 1557 the earldom of Northumberland was restored, and the reversion of Mary's manors was granted to the new earl among other former Percy properties⁹²

Mary's letter to earl Francis was written from Shrewsbury's London house of Coldharbour. As far as we know she continued to live in Talbot houses. We have evidence of Mary's living at Broomhall, outside Sheffield. Mary was visited there sometime between 1567 and 1571 by a former servant of the earls of Shrewsbury, John Hall. In 1571 Hall was accused of involvement in a plot to free the Queen of Scots, and he was required to give an account of his movements since he had left Shrewsbury's service in 1567. He gave a suspiciously detailed list of his activities, and described a visit he had paid to Broomhall, a house belonging to the old Countess of Northumberland. He emphasised that he owed her "duty in respect of her former goodness towards me". He stayed two nights with the countess before going on to Lady Wharton's, where he met the Countess of Pembroke (Anne Talbot). He escorted

⁹⁰ Lambeth Palace Library Ms. 3205 f.8

⁹¹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls P. & M.* vol. 3 p. 168

⁹² *Cal Pat Rolls P.& M.* vol. 3 no. 186

Lady Pembroke back to Broomhall staying there another night before continuing on his travels.⁹³ Once again we have an illustration of the friendly relations between the Talbot siblings. Years before, when Mary was living in her father's house, her friend and supporter lord Dacre had given another indication of this when he had sent for Mary to give "consolacion and comfort" to her sister Elizabeth who was "accrayesd wt infirmitie of sekenes" after childbirth. Another brief indication of Mary's life at Broomhall occurs in a footnote to the 1825 edition of Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*. S.W. Singer, the editor, described a letter from Mary in his possession, which puts her, he said, in an 'amiable position'. Mary was pleading on behalf of a poor man (a tenant perhaps) whose cattle had been impounded by one of Lady Cavendish's agents. Mary according to Singer was living at 'Wormhill', a place name he did not otherwise associate with her, which is likely to be a misreading of Broomhall.⁹⁴

After the death of her brother Francis, the responsibility for the ageing Countess of Northumberland was inherited by her nephew George the sixth Earl of Shrewsbury. George had married the redoubtable Bess of Hardwick by 1568, and was still reasonably contentedly married to that lady.⁹⁵ George's major problem however was that the Queen had given him the doubtful honour of being the guardian of Mary Queen of Scots. In the tense atmosphere that followed the Northern Rising in 1569, Earl George needed to demonstrate his loyalty to his Queen, which included the demonstration of the protestant religion. One thing that would not assist George in this aim was to have a conspicuously Catholic relation who blithely broke the Queen's laws on religion, and gave shelter to Catholic priests and suspected traitors. It is in this light that we must consider the final set of events in Mary's life.

In his letters to Burghley (from which much of this information comes) Earl George makes reference to Mary's state of health and seems to imply that she was verging on senility. We do not have independent evidence to confirm or deny this, and it could have been in Shrewsbury's interest to present his aunt as having lost her

⁹³ *H.M.C. Hatfield Mss.* vol 1 p 504

⁹⁴ George Cavendish, *The Life of Cardinal Wolsey*, ed. S.W. Singer (London 1825) vol 2 p xlvi n.18. Singer suggested that Wormhill was a mistake for Wressell, but since Wressell was a Percy seat this seems unlikely. It is surely far more likely that Wormhill was actually a mistaken reading of Broomhall.

⁹⁵ David Durant, *Bess of Hardwick: Portrait of an Elizabethan Dynast* (New York 1978)

mental capacity, though he assigns her infirmity purely to her age. The core of the problem was that Countess Mary was surrounded by Catholic servants and friends, and was refusing to take the sacrament in the Protestant manner according to the Queen's laws. To make matters worse she was believed to be harbouring Catholic priests, such as the elderly priest Thomas Bedall who 'slipped backwards and forwards' between Derbyshire and Yorkshire. The arrival of Archbishop Grindal in York had led to an intensifying of the anti-recusant activities of the High Commission, which the old countess had previously managed to evade.⁹⁶ Archbishop Grindal, having heard rumours, asked Shrewsbury to search her house. Three priests were discovered, the most interesting of these being Henry Comberford, formerly precentor of Lichfield, and clearly well known to William Cecil.⁹⁷ Comberford had been deprived of his benefice in Lichfield in 1559, and briefly imprisoned, but was freed by 1561.⁹⁸ Comberford's examination before the High Commission reveals him to have been bold and resilient, defiantly Catholic, and also something of a visionary. Following this arrest he spent the rest of his life in prison, but from his prison cell in York he was able to maintain contacts with 'a very small but definite and well instructed' group of recusants.⁹⁹ It would seem likely that Comberford had celebrated mass in the countess's house. Certainly according to Shrewsbury the house was acting as a centre for 'notorious papests' who were 'practisinge agenst the quenes maties procedying in relygion'. Shrewsbury named some of these, 'Francis Rolson Jhon hall Jhone Revell Wentworth of Wodhouse Jhone Longe & many others'.¹⁰⁰ The earl decided that he had to reform his aunt's household. He had some of her servants, Margery Gravenor, Anne Buckley, William King and John Pavye, arrested and

⁹⁶ Hugh Aveling, 'The Catholic Recusants of the West Riding of Yorkshire 1558-1790' *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society (Literary and Historical Section)* Vol X pt VI (1963) pp. 193, 201. Aveling incorrectly states that the 'dowager countess [who] was a Talbot' was the mother of the Earl of Northumberland involved in the northern rising, p. 206.

⁹⁷ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations* (Oxford 1993) p.260; P.R.O. S P.12/74/32. I am grateful to Dr Haigh for giving me this reference.

⁹⁸ Aveling, 'Catholic recusants of Yorkshire', p. 200

⁹⁹ S P. 12/74/32:1; Hugh Aveling, 'Catholic recusancy in the city of York 1558-1791' *Catholic Record Society Monograph series* vol 2 (London 1970) pp. 41-42; Aveling, 'Catholic recusants of Yorkshire' p. 200

¹⁰⁰ P.R.O. S.P. 53/7/68 It is not clear if this the John Hall previously mentioned.

brought before the High Commission.¹⁰¹ All were charged with religious offences (harbouring priests is implied in some cases) and required to take the oath. Margery and Anne stood firm and refused to swear, though the men did swear and agreed also to take the sacrament according to the law. Margery, the countess's chief gentlewoman eventually also capitulated and was released from prison, but only on condition she remained at least sixteen miles from the countess's residence.¹⁰²

At this point Shrewsbury may have felt he had satisfactorily reformed his aunt's household, to bring it to 'good conformitie and order'. Her servants, he claimed, had abused her, taken advantage of her position as one who:

"Forasmuch as she is by reason of great age both impotent and of no abilitie to governe her self or any other but lik a child ledd and abused to popery and such daungerous inconveniences by suche as be aboute her"¹⁰³

Shrewsbury hoped to free his aunt from the machinations of her evil servants by reforming her household, bringing in "two indifferent honest men" to oversee that household 'for good order to be kept', and asked the assistance of Burghley and the Council in doing this.¹⁰⁴ The countess herself however was clearly hostile to Shrewsbury's efforts to purge her household of papists and "utterly refused" his two honest men. Mary instead attempted to leave her house, and thus escape Shrewsbury's dominance. First she removed to the house of the mother of Francis Wortley, one of her servants. This roused Shrewsbury's fury. He described the house as a "solitare place wer none resorts but papistes and wortly's mother knone to be Anaughty papist". Shrewsbury believed that the old countess was subjected to unreasonable pressure by her servants who "by sinister practises persuad her" to remove herself. He considered that his aunt was "very wik and unaball to govern hir self and servants", though she was not, apparently, completely incapable since "by her menes [there was] contynuall acces of the worst sorte of those pepoll".¹⁰⁵ Mary may have seen the matter differently, may even have regarded old Mrs Wortley as a friend. In 1538 a letter from John Moreton to Mary's father referred to a Master Wortley in

¹⁰¹ York, Borthwick Institute, High Commission Act Book HC AB 6 f.45-46v

¹⁰² HC AB 6 f. 72v

¹⁰³ P R O S P. 53 7 43 Fontblanque transcribed 'seduced' rather than 'abused' here

¹⁰⁴ P R O S P. 53/7/43

¹⁰⁵ P.R O S P. 53/7/68

terms which suggest that he was one of the earl's dependants, so the Wortley family may have had a long history of serving the Talbots.¹⁰⁶

The earl wanted to maintain a firmer control of his aunt, and asked Burghley for authority to insist on Lady Northumberland's return to her own house, and in addition asked for leave to replace some of her servants with his own nominees. Shrewsbury's behaviour may have seemed unnecessarily heavy handed; clearly people were beginning to talk, to accuse him of acting from self-interest. He wrote indignantly to Burghley defending himself against the charge that he was not a fit person to 'intermedle' in his aunt's affairs because he hoped to profit thereby at her death. On the contrary, he insisted, he was the old lady's "speciale friend" who was acting only to protect her interests, and indeed had helped her 'to the living that she hath' since she "is impotent". Far from being taken advantage of by Shrewsbury, his aunt was being abused by "lewd persons that do still persevere in giving evill examples to the multitude"¹⁰⁷

Though Shrewsbury might seem to protest too much, he can probably be acquitted of having designs on Lady Northumberland's wealth, simply because she had comparatively little, and most of that (such as her annuities) would lapse at her death, or (like the 'parcel of rectories') pass to other members of the family in any case. The Percy lands she held were due to revert to the Earl of Northumberland, but since the earl was in exile as a traitor at the time of her death, and was executed not long afterwards, those lands would pass to the crown. They were unlikely to go to Shrewsbury.

Mary did return from Mrs Wortley's house, (willingly or not we do not know) since a few weeks later she was trying to move again. This time she claimed that she wished to visit her sister Anne, Lady Pembroke, in Shropshire. This was plausible since the two sisters were on good terms. However, Shrewsbury did not believe his aunt. Instead he thought that she wished to go to a house of Sir Thomas Fitzherbert's in Staffordshire, another "haunt of suspected p[er]sons".¹⁰⁸ The earl tried to deflect his

¹⁰⁶ Lambeth Palace Library Ms. 3206 f. 39

¹⁰⁷ P.R.O. S.P. 53/7/76

¹⁰⁸ The *Dictionary of National Biography* does not identify this Sir Thomas Fitzherbert, but does mention two cousins, Thomas and Nicholas Fitzherbert, probably of the next generation (since they were very young men in 1571). They had Staffordshire connections, and both were notorious recusants, one later a Jesuit and

aunt from her purpose by offering her the use of any of his houses if she wanted a change of air for her health (giving a reflection on the state of hygiene of Tudor houses). He made his intention clear to Burghley by stressing that "if she remayne where I may have daily my eye unto her and such as shall resort unto her' then "no further great inconvenience "should occur."¹⁰⁹

The Earl of Shrewsbury repeatedly told Burghley of his aunt's weakness and impotence through old age. He painted a picture of a fragile, rather pathetic old woman, to be pitied and excused because of that weakness. Of course Shrewsbury was hoping to avoid being tainted with his aunt's Catholicism, and perhaps he may genuinely have wanted to spare her the kind of treatment that her servants such as Margery Gravenor had to endure. In this correspondence with Burghley, however, Shrewsbury made no specific references to the countess's ailments. In particular he made no reference to the old rumour of the falling sickness. It could be said that after forty years, such things would have been forgotten even within the family. But there is an intriguing piece of evidence that suggests that rumours of some sort concerning the old countess's health were in circulation.

In the course of his interrogation Henry Comberford was asked 'whether he thinketh the old countess . . . to have bene possessed with an evil spirite'. Far from making an indignant denial of any such suggestion about his patroness, Comberford happily agreed, and went on to describe his exorcising of the evil spirit. To perform an exorcism was tantamount to admitting to being a Catholic priest, but Comberford had already happily admitted that. Now he described his session with the countess in vivid detail

. . . this said examynat saieth that he hath seen the Mouth of the said Countesse drawen cleane awry and her eyes horribly stairinge owte of her heade and the said countesse wt one breath to utter . . . infinite and blasphemous othes to denye god and the Catholic Church. And he this examynat saieth that he hath done the beste he could by fastinge and praieing to heale the said countesse. And by reading thrise over the psalme of Exurgat Deus and two other psalmes wth the gospell where the castinge owt of divells is mencond, he this said examynat thinketh he hath expelled the said spirite and thereby done the countess muche good.¹¹⁰

the other later secretary to Cardinal Allen. Anthony A Wood *Athenae Oxoniensis* vol. II pp.121, 661-662; *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 19, p. 168

¹⁰⁹ P.R.O. S.P. 53/7/85

¹¹⁰ P.R.O. S.P. 12/74/32:1

Exactly what had happened is impossible to tell. Clearly the old countess had a seizure of some kind while Comberford was with her, and had recovered following his ministrations. His description would accord with an epileptic fit, from which full recovery would be possible. A stroke or apoplexy would be unlikely to lead to recovery in the way Comberford suggests, and while they cannot be totally ruled out, epilepsy seems more likely and resonates with the rumour picked up by Norfolk so long before. If he knew the countess was epileptic, and might lose control of herself during a seizure, it was all the more reasonable that the Earl of Shrewsbury should want to keep a firm hand on his recalcitrant aunt. He would wish to do this without revealing the shameful secret of her illness, though Comberford, happy to have cast out the devil, had no inhibitions about doing so.

The correspondence ceases with Mary's wish to go to Lady Pembroke's, so whether Mary countess of Northumberland managed to escape her nephew's conscientious guardianship and flee to some more congenial company is not clear. But by the following Spring she was accepting the limitations of her life, aged and probably ill. On 16 April 1572 she wrote her will, emphasising that though 'being weake in bodie' she was yet of 'perfecte and good remembrance'. Mary, or perhaps the clerk who wrote out the will, avoided a traditional Catholic formula invoking the help of the saints and the blessed virgin such as her father had used for the safe keeping of his soul, and instead said 'I do gyve and comende my soule into the handes and custodie of my Savioure and Redemer Jesu Christe, by whose merites I verily do truste to be maide and accepted an inheritor of salvacion'. She left twenty pounds 'and more if nede shalbe' as dole for the poor at her funeral, and black cloth gowns or coats for her servants to wear as they attended her corpse to its burial. Her servants were also given cash legacies. Six women and nineteen men servants were named in all, the most important was Margery Gravener who was left one hundred marks 'in consideracion of her longe and faythefull service done unto me'. Two other women, Anne Bulkeley and Marie Everede were left twenty pounds each. The men servants were given only small sums ranging from five marks down to 6s 8d, suggesting that the named women were attendant gentlewomen while the men were household servants only. Apart from these traditional bequests to her household, Mary's will included only two personal legacies. To 'my loving sister' the Countess of

Pembroke she left 'a silver cupp gilte, with a cover that haythe a knopp upon'. To her great nephew the Lord Talbot (Francis, son of Earl George) she left 'one silver goblet with a cover'. More than thirty years previously, the fourth earl had bequeathed two silver cups, one of them of the King's New Year's gift, to his daughter Mary. Were these the same two cups, preserved as heirlooms and now passed on through the family? It is surely reasonable to think so. Mary asked these two, Anne Pembroke and Francis Talbot, to be her executors. Francis was asked to enter into a bond of £600 to 'truly performe this my will'. If he refused to do so then Lady Pembroke was to be sole executor. In the event, this was what happened. Perhaps Francis considered that, as his father had already found, his old aunt's affairs were more trouble than they were worth.¹¹¹

By 6 June 1572 Mary Countess of Northumberland was dead, for her will was proved that day. She was buried in St Peter's Church Sheffield (later Sheffield Cathedral) where her father had built a chapel and was buried himself. Mary had outlived her husband for more than thirty years, and now in death as in life, they were at the last divided. Northumberland rested at Hackney, while Mary, at Sheffield lay in the bosom of her family and not with the Percies.

¹¹¹ York Registry Wills, vol. 19 B f.511v.; an abbreviated form of Mary's will is published in 'Durham Wills' vol. 2, *Surtees Society* vol. 38 (1860) pp. 6-7.

Chapter Seven

Susan Clarencius: 'good old woman'¹

The life of Susan Clarencius illustrates the opportunities that existed in mid Tudor England for a woman to make a career in royal service just as a man could. In the first half of the century these opportunities were very limited. Jane Rochford's life shows that a woman could serve the queen consort, and the life of Anne Basset shows that positions in the queen consort's service were eagerly sought after. The reign of Mary I, however, gave opportunities for the first time for a woman to serve not simply a consort but a reigning monarch, with all the advantages that that implied. Susan Clarencius clearly benefitted from those advantages as will be seen below. Her career shows how a woman (provided that she was a widow) was able to use royal service to accumulate very tangible benefits in her own right, not simply to use it as a stepping stone on the way to a good marriage.

Susan Clarencius² was born Susan White, daughter of an Essex gentleman, Richard White of Hutton. Hutton Hall was in south Essex, between Chelmsford and London, and Susan kept a connection with this area for much of her life. Susan's mother was Maud Tyrell daughter of Sir William Tyrell of Heron, another south Essex manor. The Tyrells were of greater local prominence than their neighbours the Whites. Their principal seat of Heron Hall was a house of some splendour, and several heads of the family were sufficiently prominent to be knighted, including Maud's brother Sir Thomas and her nephew and great-nephew. Her great nephew Sir Henry Tyrell was Sheriff of Essex in 1551, having been knighted for Edward VI's coronation.³ Susan Clarencius retained her family links with the Tyrells and Sir Henry in particular at least until 1557 when she named him as a possible heir to her estates.⁴

¹ A description of Mrs Clarencius in a letter from Sir Thomas Challoner. *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eltz. 1561-62* pp. 519-520

² The form 'Clarencius' is only one of many version's of Susan Tonge's *nom de plume*, which included others such as Clarencieux which are closer to the original. The form used here perhaps gives some indication of pronunciation.

³ Rev. Philip Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex* ed. G.H. Martin, (Wakefield 1978 first pub. 1763-68) vol. 1. p. 195 (White of Hutton); vol.1 pp. 208-209 (Tyrrell of Heron). W.A. Shaw, *The Knights of England* (London 1906) vol. 1 p.152 (Sir Henry Tyrrell vol. 2 p. 38 (Sir Thomas Tyrrell)

⁴ *Calendar of Patent Rolls Philip & Mary* vol. 4 pp. 50-51

Richard and Maud White had four children, a son Richard, and three daughters Mary, Jane and Susan. The date of Susan's birth is unknown but is likely to have been in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Her mother's brother died, already the father of a mature heir, as early as 1476. Susan herself was clearly a mature woman by 1536 and was described as 'good old woman' in 1562. This would still be consistent with her being born as late as 1510, but a birthdate much later than this seems unlikely.⁵ At some time before 1536 Susan White married Thomas Tonge, a herald Tonge seems to have been appointed York Herald in April 1513 and in that capacity he took part in the Flodden campaign of the following September. He was also present at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. On Allhallows Day 1522 he became Norroy King of Arms, and finally on 2 August 1534 he was created Clarencieux herald. It would seem likely that he was already married to Susan White by this time. Clearly Susan relished being married to a senior herald, since for the rest of her life she retained the sobriquet 'Mrs Clarencius' which derived from Thomas Tonge's title⁶

Thomas Tonge held the position of Clarencieux for less than two years, dying in late March 1536 His will, written on 19 March and proved on 4 April, provides some hint of his relationship with Susan.⁷ After a conventional Catholic preamble, leaving his soul to almighty God, His glorious mother and the celestial company of saints in heaven, Tonge instructed Susan to dispose suitably of four pounds at his funeral. She was made residuary legatee with instructions to pay his debts, and finally Tonge appointed his wife as his executor, joined together with Guthlake Overton as overseer for carrying out his wishes. It is clear from this that Tonge trusted Susan and respected her judgement, though it was quite usual for a wife to be her husband's executor.⁸ Whether by Susan's wishes or for some other reason, Tonge was not buried as he had wished in St John's Clerkenwell, but at St Mary Overy, Southwark.⁹

⁵ Francis W. Steer, 'Essex Lady who was a Queen's favourite' *Essex Review* 50 (1941) 94-99 suggests 1500 to 1510 as the likely period for Susan's birth.

⁶ W.H. Godfrey, 'Thomas Tonge, Clarenceux' *Notes and Queries* November 25 1939 pp. 388-389; Sir Anthony Wagner et. al., *The College of Arms* pp. 81-82

⁷ P.C.C. 34 Hogen dated 19 March 1536

⁸ Mary Prior, 'Wives and Wills' in John Chartres and David Hey *English Rural Society 1500-1800: Essays in honour of Joan Thirsk* (Cambridge 1990) pp. 201-225

⁹ Mark Noble, *A History of the College of Arms* (London 1805) p. 116 Noble is mistaken about the date of Tonge's death, which he gives as 2nd August 1534

Nearly twenty years after his death, in 1554 an enamelled heraldic plaque was made bearing the arms of 'Maister Tonge otherwysse callyd Maister Clarencius and Mesteris Susan hys wyfe'. The purpose of the plaque is unclear. The informal nature of the inscription suggests that the plaque was not made for any official purpose, and it may have been intended for a private memorial of some kind. Since Susan was at that time in a position of considerable influence it is likely that her arms would have been included in such a plaque as a compliment to her, even if she was not herself responsible for the making of the plaque.¹⁰

It would appear that Susan and Thomas Tonge had no children, or at least none who survived infancy. Tonge's will makes no mention of children, and when Susan herself came to make a disposition of her property in 1557 she made her nephews and other family members her heirs. How she felt about this childlessness we have no way of telling, but in her old age she seems to have found a kind of surrogate grandmotherhood tending to Jane Dormer's baby son.¹¹

The main work of Susan's life was to be, not motherhood but service to a royal mistress. The exact date of her entry into Mary's service is not clear, but it was probably before Tonge's death. In June 1536, following her submission to the King's will after the deaths of both her mother and Anne Boleyn, Mary wrote to Cromwell concerning the establishment of a new household. She expressed herself willing to accept 'what men and women the King will appoint me' but she added that 'I think Margery Baynton and Susan Clarencius ought to be considered for their faithful service to the King and me since they came into my company'.¹² Since Tonge had been dead less than three months when Mary wrote this, Susan would have had little time to make herself a favourite if she had not entered the princess's service until her widowhood began. Certainly for husbands the period of mourning was often remarkably short by later standards, but it could be assumed that Susan would have wanted at least a month to settle Tonge's affairs, if not to grieve for him, thus leaving

¹⁰ Steer, 'Essex Lady' illustrates the plaque. The Tonge plaque is now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (catalogue reference number 4358-1857) and I am grateful to Anthony North of the museum for information about it.

¹¹ See below p. 237

¹² *L.P.* vol.10 no.1186

barely two months to make herself indispensable to Mary.¹³ All this argues for an earlier date for her entering Mary's service. Just as the date is uncertain, so are the circumstances that brought Susan Clarencius to court, though as a senior herald Tonge would surely have had court connections. Cromwell responded to Mary's plea, for the list of persons attending on the Ladies Mary and Elizabeth drawn up in 1536 included Mrs Clarencius, and she was to remain in Mary's household so long as that household existed.¹⁴ One of her earliest appearances on a ceremonial occasion was for the funeral of Jane Seymour when Mary was the chief mourner. Mrs Clarencius took part in the solemn procession accompanying the royal corpse from Hampton Court to Windsor for burial, riding in the "fourth chair" with other gentlewomen.¹⁵

The privy purse accounts kept for the Lady Mary reveal some of Susan Clarencius's activities during this period.¹⁶ She seems often to have been employed to do the princess's shopping, for articles varying from gold wire to cinnamon. In both January 1543 and 1544 she was given the task of buying the royal new year gifts, and in 1544 she was recorded as spending seventy-one pounds in the process, which indicates that she was already trusted. At least once she seems to have spent money of her own (admittedly only 8s 5d) on the princess's behalf, and then been reimbursed¹⁷

As a prominent member of Mary's household even during the later part of King Henry's reign, Susan began to accumulate the rewards that were a perquisite of royal service. Her first such reward was an annuity of £13 6s 8d, paid from the Court of Augmentations for her services to the Lady Mary. At the same time Susan's colleague (and probable friend) Frideswide Knight received a similar annuity but for the lesser sum of £10, suggesting that as early as 1543 Susan's pre-eminence among

¹³ Sir Thomas More married his second wife within weeks of his first wife's death. Richard Marius, *Thomas More*, p.42. Sabine Johnson did not consider it odd to encourage her recently widowed cousin to consider a new husband even while she still awaited the birth of a child. P.R.O. S.P. 1/120/120; below. p. 252

¹⁴ *L.P.* vol.10 no.1187; see the lists of Mary's household as princess and queen in David Loades, *Mary Tudor: a life* (Oxford 1989) pp. 346-357

¹⁵ *L.P.* vol.12ii no.1060, 12 Nov. 1537

¹⁶ Frederick Madden, ed. *Privy purse expenses of the Princess Mary* (London 1831)

¹⁷ Madden, *op. cit.* pp. 100, 149 (new year's gifts), 132 (8s 5d), 138, 159 (wire) 161 (cinnamon)

Mary's gentlewomen was recognised.¹⁸ The annuity was paid during the next year, but was surrendered in July 1544 to be replaced by a more valuable mark of royal favour. Over the years Susan Clarencius was to provide an (albeit relatively modest) example of the truism that a person's conservative religious opinions were no bar to their holding confiscated church property. She now received her first such grant, of the manor of Chevenhall alias Chepenhall in Suffolk, formerly part of the estates of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds.¹⁹ The manor had been valued at the time of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* as worth £23 10s, so Mrs Clarencius had profited by this grant despite losing her annuity.²⁰ Meanwhile the clerk of the Augmentations continued to record the annuity for some time accompanied by the record of a nil payment.²¹

Mrs Clarencius remained in Mary's service during the reign of Edward VI. During this period Mary's principal residence was the palace of Newhall (otherwise Beaulieu) in Essex, not far from the town of Chelmsford,²² and within easy reach of Susan's family home of Hutton. It would seem that Susan was able to divide her time comfortably between her obligations to her mistress, and family and other activities during this period. She certainly stayed sometimes at Hutton, for Sir William Petre's account books record him playing cards with Mrs Clarencius at Hutton.²³ Petre was both a neighbour and a family connection of Susan's. His house, Ingatestone Hall was near both New Hall and Hutton. Moreover his two wives were both members of the Tyrell family Anne (Browne) the second and more significant, had been married previously to John Tyrell, son of Susan's first cousin Sir Thomas Tyrell. The family contacts were maintained despite Anne's remarriage to William Petre (or perhaps because of them since Petre like Susan served Mary)²⁴. In July 1548 Susan Clarencius was a guest at a family wedding at Ingatestone, when one 'mistress Anne' married Mr Stonard of Luxborough, Chigwell. Susan attended Sunday supper together with other neighbours or relations such as Mistress Mildmay and Mistress

¹⁸ *L.P.* vol.18 no.982

¹⁹ *L.P.* vol.19i no.1036

²⁰ *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (London 1817) vol. 3 p. 460

²¹ e.g. *L.P.* vol.20i no.557; vol.21i, no. 643; vol.21ii no. 775

²² This was the same Newhall of which George Boleyn had been made keeper.

See above p. 158

²³ F.G. Emmison, *Tudor secretary: Sir William Petre at court and home* (London 1961) p. 127

²⁴ See above pp. 99-100 for a law case involving Anne Petre

Tyrell of Shenfield. It is likely that Susan came over to Ingatestone for the day from Newhall or Hutton, since she is not among those recorded as present on the Monday.²⁵ Mistress Anne is not otherwise identified by Petre's clerk, but Emmison suggests she was Lady Petre's daughter by her first marriage. Morant wrote that Lady Petre had two "infant daughters" when Thomas Tyrell died in 1540 and if the term "infant" is used in a legal rather than a colloquial sense this would be a possible identification, which would also explain the presence of Mrs Clarencius and other Tyrell kin at the wedding.²⁶ Certainly Lady Petre maintained her links with the Tyrell and White families. In her will written in 1582 she remembered "my brother Sir Henry Tyrell", her cousin Thomas Tyrell, her cousin George White (Susan's nephew) and her godson Richard White, George's son.²⁷

Following the first grant of Chevenhall, Susan continued to garner in manors, already now concentrating her holding in her own home county of Essex. A note in the Acts of the Privy Council for March 1553 refers to a grant to her of the manors of Loverdown and Thamberley Hall, worth yearly rents of £8 and twenty marks respectively.²⁸ Curiously there seem to be no further references to these two manors, suggesting that the grant was never made or there was some mistake in the names given (No such manors are mentioned in Morant's index.) A few months later Susan obtained another Essex manor, Thundersley, this time by paying the sum of £212 7s 10d into the Court of Augmentations, though the grant records that the manor was also in respect of her services to the king's sister the Lady Mary.²⁹ The manor was valued at an annual rent of £27 16s 8d. Thundersley had already been leased to William Parr, marquess of Northampton for 40 years at £100 rent (£99 6s 8d, plus 13s 4d increment). Susan was to receive the rent for the remainder of the forty year period, though Thundersley in fact remained in the hands of the White family until Richard White alienated it in 1595. Susan would surely have known the marquess of Northampton, brother of Queen Catherine Parr. A few months after Mary's accession

²⁵ Emmison, *Tudor secretary*, p. 219

²⁶ Morant, *History . . . of Essex* p. 208-209

²⁷ F.G. Emmison, *Elizabethan life: wills of Essex gentry and merchants* (Chelmsford 1978) p.34

²⁸ John Roche Dasent, ed. *Acts of the Privy Council* (London 1894) vol. 4 N.S. 1552-54 for 27th March 1553

²⁹ *Cal. Pat Rolls Edward VI* vol. 5 p. 28

Susan joined the Queen's friend Gertrude Marchioness of Exeter in pleading for clemency for the disgraced Northampton.³⁰

To what extent was Susan Clarentius in her mistress's confidence? This is obviously difficult to tell though there is evidence from the beginning of Mary's reign to suggest that she was sometimes in receipt of Mary's secret thoughts. It would seem likely that Susan may have known of the plan of the imperial envoy Van der Delft and his secretary Jehan Dubois to organise Mary's escape from England in 1550. Certainly there is evidence of contact between Susan and Madame Van der Delft. Following Van der Delft's death, his widow sent Francesco Moronelli to London to sort out her affairs. This included delivering a letter to an unnamed 'lady in London' to ask her to speak to Mrs Clarencius about payments made by the 'said widow' for a girl who was at school in Bruges. As Francesco's master Dubois wrote to the Queen of Hungary, the letter could not be delivered because 'the lady' was at Newhall. Though this anecdote is inconclusive it at least suggests social contact between Mrs Clarencius and the envoy's wife.³¹

Following the death of Edward VI, and the failure of the Duke of Northumberland's coup, the life of Susan Clarencius saw a major change. No longer was she as Dubois had put it 'chief lady in the princess's household' but mistress of the robes to a reigning Queen³². There was no real precedent for a female monarch's court, and unlike her sister, Mary did not rule long enough to establish a new pattern³³. Noble and royal households were traditionally predominantly male organisations, with women - even consorts - often playing a very minor role.³⁴ In Mary's new royal household men still filled the major positions, but as a woman, the

³⁰ *Cal. S.P. Spanish Edward VI and Mary* vol. 11 p. 198-207

³¹ *Cal. S. P. Spanish Edward VI 1550-52* vol.10 pp. 220-223

³² David Loades, *The reign of Mary Tudor* (London 2nd ed. 1991) p. 43

³³ Joan B. Goldsmith *All the Queen's women: the changing place and perception of aristocratic women in Elizabethan England 1558-1620* (Unpublished PhD thesis Northwestern University 1987)

³⁴ See two articles in David Starkey et al *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London 1987): John Murphy, 'The illusion of decline: the Privy Chamber 1547-1558' pp. 140-141 for Mary's women and Pam Wright 'A change of direction: the ramifications of a female household 1558-1603' pp. 147-172 for the development under Elizabeth. For the noble household more generally see Kate Mertes *The English Noble Household* (Oxford 1988) and Paul V.B. Jones *The household of a Tudor nobleman* (Urbana/New York 1917/1970)

queen was surrounded in the most intimate positions by other women. The Privy Chamber in particular now became largely female.³⁵ Murphy suggests that these women 'had no ambitions to form a petticoat government' and moreover played little part in obtaining patronage or favour for their menfolk. Mrs Clarencius may not have wished to form a petticoat government, but she was clearly prepared to use favour and influence. She also had no hesitation in taking advantage of her position to further her own and her family's interests, as will be seen below.

The new female court meant new definitions of responsibilities, though probably a continuation of familiar roles in new guises. Susan Clarencius, in close proximity to the queen, acted as her mistress of the robes, handling the work of the old Yeoman of the Robes, literally concerned with the queen's clothes, jewels etc, and also at least some of the work of the Groom of the Stool (if not necessarily the most intimate aspects of that post). Her professional responsibilities with the queen's garments might have included giving advice on dress to her mistress (memorably described by a Spanish courtier as 'a perfect saint, who dresses badly').³⁶

We know little of Susan's own taste in clothes though there is a suggestion that she was interested in clothes and liked bright colours, since she acquired (or perhaps bought) three kirtles, one of white velvet, one of crimson taffeta and one of purple damask, when the disgraced Duchess of Northumberland's wardrobe was being disposed of from the stores in the palace of Westminster.³⁷ We also know that Susan Clarencius bought cloth from John Bedell, who was later to become involved in the Dudley conspiracy.³⁸ Like Lady Lisle, Mrs Clarencius may have been aware of the impact of stylish dressing, but unlike Lady Lisle we know little more about her wardrobe than this. We do know that Susan Clarencius received a special gown of scarlet trimmed with 'oon ffurre of letes' for the queen's coronation procession. The strict hierarchy of precedence was observed in these liveries, and lettuce, a greyish fur, was of lower status than the ermine worn on the same occasion by the Lady Elizabeth and Lady Devonshire. Mrs Clarencius's name though headed the list of the

³⁵ Loades, *op. cit.* pp. 42-43

³⁶ David Loades, *Mary Tudor: a Life*, p. 225

³⁷ *H.M.C. Calendar of Mss of the Marquess of Salisbury at Hatfield House* (London 1883) part 1 no. 475 pp.127-132

³⁸ P.R.O. S.P.11/7/30 I am grateful to Charles Knighton for this reference.

gentlewomen given such gowns.³⁹ We know little else of Susan's private purchases, but she displayed the more serious side of her nature when at the same time as obtaining the Duchess's kirtles she also bought a pair of sheets destined for the poor folks of the Savoy, and a painted paper depicting the Passion.⁴⁰ This last might perhaps have been a page from an old illuminated book, perhaps part of some former monastic library.

Once Mary had overthrown the Duke of Northumberland and safely become queen, a main concern of all those around her was the question of her marriage. In early September 1553 the imperial envoy Simon Renard, who was becoming a close confidante of the queen, wrote to Granvelle the Bishop of Arras that the queen had told him her ladies talked of nothing but marriage.⁴¹ Susan is likely to have been one of those ladies. With the early discussions over the queen's marriage the closeness of the relationship between Susan and the queen becomes apparent. It is obvious that the queen trusted Susan completely. It is also obvious that others considered pleasing Susan Clarencius a useful short cut to pleasing the queen, suggesting that she was at least believed to have great influence with her mistress.

In September 1553 Edward Courtenay, son of Mary's old friend and supporter Gertrude Marchioness of Exeter, and himself recently restored to the Earldom of Devon, was a serious contender for Mary's hand, at least in his own eyes. His suit was supported by Bishop Gardiner and 'all her working councillors apart from Paget' though not by Mary's 'intimates' apart from Gertrude herself.⁴² Courtenay saw the need to flatter at least one of these intimates. The Spanish ambassadors, hardly impartial observers, wrote with some irritation of Courtenay giving himself airs, and trying to show his support for the old religion. He was reported to call the Bishop of Winchester his father and 'Dame Clarentius' his mother.⁴³ Susan seems to have been

³⁹ The most striking example of the coronation liveries was awarded to 'Jane our woman fool' who received not one gown but two. Jane's gaudy glories are lavishly described in the official warrant: one gown of "prple golde tincell thoder gowne of crimson satten layed with thredde of gold oon kyrtell of blewe sylke ffrendged wt blew sylke striped wt golde' P.R.O. S.P. 46/8/5

⁴⁰ *H.M.C. Hatfield* part 1 no. 475 pp.127-132. Susan also bought leather hangings, and received a gift of 43 ounces of 'white plate' from Northumberland's goods. P.R.O. E 101/520/14

⁴¹ *Cal. S.P. Span.* vol. 11 p. 213

⁴² John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford 1988) pp. 228, 230

⁴³ *Cal. S.P. Span.* vol. 11 p. 242

unimpressed and was almost certainly privy to her mistress's real feelings in the matter. Just like Courtenay, the Spanish ambassadors saw the need to cultivate Mrs Clarencius. Simon Renard advised Granvelle before 13 September 1553 that Don Diego de Mendoza should have private discussions with Clarencius about the marriage, but failed to report back to the bishop whether this had been done.⁴⁴ A later despatch (in March 1554) suggests that such talks were held. Jehan Dubois had accused Simon Renard of taking bribes. Granvelle held an inquiry into the accusation, and part of the evidence given to this inquiry referred to these discussions. It was said that Mendoza had several times conferred with Susan Clarencius in the house of a London alderman and had given her a letter to deliver to the queen. This paper includes reference to a paragraph supposedly added to a previous ambassadorial despatch, in which Courtenay was described as calling Susan his mother, but in which also Susan was said to be negotiating about Courtenay.⁴⁵ Whether or not such talks ever took place, some Spanish diplomats obviously believed that Mrs Clarencius was of sufficient importance to be involved in them. No one here seemed to think there was anything inappropriate in a woman conducting such vital diplomatic negotiations.

About September 24 the Spanish ambassadors reported a formal audience with the queen. The previous evening however they had held a more private meeting with the queen, known only to the two servants who conducted them into the royal presence, and to "Dame Clarentius, whom she trusts" who was in waiting. The implication here is that Mary did not have the same trust in all her servants, specifically at this point no doubt those who were still backing Courtenay.⁴⁶ The queen demonstrated her trust in Mrs Clarencius even more dramatically about six weeks later. As Clarencius no doubt knew perfectly well, Mary had made up her mind to marry Philip of Spain. On 10 October Simon Renard proposed to the queen on behalf of the prince. Mary accepted on the 28th, and on the 29th October in a moving little ceremony she swore that she would marry the Prince of Spain. Besides the queen, only Renard and Susan Clarencius were in the room, but the Blessed

⁴⁴ *Cal.S.P. Span.* vol. 11 pp. 230-231

⁴⁵ *Cal. S.P. Span.* vol. 12 pp. 179-180; Susan's nephew Humphrey White was a citizen and merchant tailor of London, so it is possible that his house was the rendezvous.

⁴⁶ *Cal. S.P. Span.* vol.11 p. 252

Sacrament was also present, making the ceremony potent with meaning for the queen. Renard was not sure whether Mrs Clarencius understood the significance of the occasion (presumably he and the queen were not speaking English) but she showed him so much affection that he felt she must do so.⁴⁷ Loades stresses the emotional strain that Mary was under at this time, when a matter she saw as personal was being treated by the men around her as purely a matter of state.⁴⁸ In this frame of mind Mary will have been glad of Susan Clarencius's support and it is hardly surprising, since Susan knew Mary's desire, that Renard reported (in terms that indicated Clarencius's importance) on 6 November 'Clarentius has made known her decree and supports our cause to the uttermost'.⁴⁹

Royal service had its risks (as Jane Rochford had discovered) but of course it also had its rewards. Renard produced a list of those he thought his master should reward when he arrived in England, and naturally enough he included Mrs Clarencius. Philip did not finally arrive until July 1554, and though Mrs Clarencius was duly rewarded, her unspecified reward was merely one in a list of many. She and 'Stirley's wife' (Frideswide Strelley, nee Knight) were named as the queen's chief ladies, together with 22 others. The impression is given that Philip was rewarding Mary's servants automatically, without any real knowledge of an individual's service.⁵⁰

The queen, unlike Philip at this time, was well aware of the worth of Susan Clarencius' service, and the rewards Mary gave Susan were of considerable and lasting value. The award of the manor of Thundersley was confirmed by Mary for forty years, and augmented with the advowson of the rectory.⁵¹ Susan presented rectors to the parish in 1554 and 1558.⁵² In March 1555 she received her most important and substantial grant of Essex lands, some of them former church lands; these comprised the adjoining manors of Chingford St Paul and Chingford Comitris, the neighbouring manors of Runwell and Rivenhall, and various parcels of related

⁴⁷ *Cal. S. P. Span.* vol. p. 328

⁴⁸ Loades, *Mary Tudor*, pp. 204-205

⁴⁹ *Cal. S. P. Span.* vol.11 p. 344

⁵⁰ *Cal. S. P. Span.* vol. 11 p. 397; vol. 12 pp. 314-316

⁵¹ *Morant. History . . . of Essex* vol. 1 p. 265

⁵² Guildhall Library Ms. 9531/12 pt. 2 (Bishop Bonner's Register.) The register and Morant both give the date as February 1558, but if the register used old style this would of course be 1559. Susan was still in England at that time.

lands.⁵³ Chingford St Paul, as its name suggests, had belonged until recently to St Paul's Cathedral, and was rated in the *Valor* as worth £27 6s 8d. Runwell, also part of the possessions of St Paul's, was worth £37 10s.⁵⁴ Runwell and Rivenhall had been in the hands of Sir John Gates, lately attainted as a supporter of Northumberland's, while the two Chingford manors had been held by Thomas, Lord Darcy of Chiche. As part of the award Mrs Clarencius was also given the advowsons of the rectories of Rivenhall, Chingford and Sandon.

Other manors came into Susan's hands, though for a shorter time. In May 1554 she was awarded the reversion of the manor of Bockingfold in Kent together with an annual rent of £12, also from the holding of the attainted Gates. She also leased the manor (or possibly leased only the reversion) of the manor of Bosworth from Lady Anne Grey. Susan held Bockingfold for a mere eighteen months, granting it in November 1555 to Thomas Culpeper of Bedgbury, Kent. Similarly the reversion to Bosworth was granted to Edward Hastings, Master of the Horse, as a reward for his services against the traitors 'Wyat Northumberland and others'. It seems that while she was prepared to make money out of other land holdings, it was the Essex lands which really interested Susan Clarencius.⁵⁵

Another valuable form of property available to someone well-connected like Susan Clarencius was the wardship.⁵⁶ She held several over the five years of Mary's reign. One of these, that of William Latham, involved property in Hornchurch and Upminster, in Susan's own part of Essex, so it is possible that she knew the Latham family, though she received a useful annuity of twenty marks from their lands, which were worth £129 9s 2d. Other wardships granted to Susan do not appear to have an Essex connection and may have been purely for financial benefit. Two wardships were for heirs with estates in Yorkshire, Richard Wilcokk and Robert Stapleton. The agreement for Wilcokk required Mrs Clarencius to perform 'the usual covenants for the education of the ward' suggesting a degree of responsibility by the holder of the wardship, and Wilcokk's wardship was worth a mere £20 17s. Stapleton's was more

⁵³ *Cal. Pat. Rolls Philip and Mary* vol.1 p. 225

⁵⁴ *Valor Ecclesiasticus* vol. 1 p. 360

⁵⁵ For Bockingfold see *Cal. Pat. Rolls P. & M.* vol. 1 p.109, vol. 3 p. 209; for Bosworth see *Cal. Pat. Rolls P. & M.* vol. 3 pp. 39-40, 113

⁵⁶ See Joel Hurstfield, *The Queen's wards: wardship and marriage under Elizabeth I* (London 1958) for wardship and its uses in this period.

valuable since his estate was worth £231 13s 1d. Very shortly before Mary's death Mrs Clarencius received the wardship of Henry Morgan and of the 'right heir of Henry Sandon'. The wardship of Henry Morgan, worth £78 15s, was confirmed with a further grant nearly a year later, in October 1559.⁵⁷ Wardship was clearly profitable. In addition to any other benefits she may have had, Mrs Clarencius received annuities of 40 marks from Stapleton's lands in Yorkshire and 20 marks from Latham's in Essex. The two wardships of Morgan and Wilcokk were free grants to Susan, rewards for service, but she had to pay for the others. Latham's wardship cost her £150 but as he was almost eighteen it would be short lived. Morgan's wardship cost £250, but would give Susan an income for much longer as the boy was only eleven⁵⁸

As might be expected from someone so close to the Queen, Susan Clarencius' name appears in the New Year Gift list of 1557, though presenting the somewhat unadventurous gift of a purse containing £6 13s.⁵⁹ Her colleague Mrs 'Sturley' gave a similar gift of £6 13s 4d also in a purse while other gentlewomen gave smaller amounts of money also in purses. All received the standard items of plate in return but Susan's gilt cup of 22 ounces was the most substantial gift to any of the gentlewomen of the household listed, as befitted her preeminent position.

The importance of Mrs Clarencius' position in the Queen's household is emphasised by many of the references to her. She was physically in close proximity to the Queen. An anecdote told by the Queen herself to Simon Renard illustrates this.⁶⁰ Early in December 1553 the Queen was discussing with Renard whether or not she should allow Elizabeth to leave the Court. Renard was doubtful because of the imminent rising of Parliament but advised the Queen to consult the Council. In answer, to express her suspicion of Elizabeth, Mary told Renard of an incident a few

⁵⁷ Hurstfield noted this wardship, particularly because of its confirmation, but misread the name of the holder of the wardship as 'Mr Clavencurry'. Hurstfield, *The Queen's wards*, p. 86

⁵⁸ P.R.O. WARDS 9/155 and 9/156 do not have numbered folios. William Latham: WARDS 9/155, *Cal Pat. Rolls P. & M.* vol. 4 pp. 302-3; Richard Wilcokk: WARDS 9/155, *Cal Pat. Rolls P. & M.* vol. 3 p. 22; Robert Stapleton: WARDS 9/155, *Cal. Pat. Rolls P. & M.* vol. 4 p. 304; Henry Morgan: P.R.O. WARDS 9/156, *Cal Pat. Rolls Eliz* vol. 1 p. 47

⁵⁹ Loades, *Mary Tudor*, p. 363

⁶⁰ *Cal. S.P. Span.* vol. 11 p. 411

days before, on St Andrew's day. The royal ladies had been on their way to the chapel for vespers with other members of the court, when a shout of 'Treason' was heard. Mary acted as if nothing had happened, but Elizabeth was very shaken, 'so much perturbed that she could not compose her countenance'. To cover up her fear, or, as Mary seems to have believed, her guilt, Elizabeth turned to Dame Clarencius and asked her to rub her stomach. Elizabeth expressed her shock that the Queen should not have heeded such a warning, saying she was trembling for fear lest some outrage might be attempted against the queen's person. In fact, as the Queen told Renard, the culprit was a former victim of Gardiner's, someone the Chancellor had caused to be imprisoned years earlier. From the point of view of Mrs Clarencius' biography, this anecdote reveals the intimacy of her relations with the royal ladies, since neither Queen nor princess saw anything untoward in Clarencius rubbing Elizabeth's stomach when the princess was apparently feeling faint.

Another story involving Mrs Clarencius and the Lady Elizabeth was told by Foxe ⁶¹ He described a night time visit when Elizabeth was summoned to see Mary at Hampton Court. Elizabeth, still under suspicion following Wyatt's rebellion, was brought to the court under the escort of Sir Henry Bedingfield. After a week's waiting, during which according to Foxe, Elizabeth told Stephen Gardiner that she would rather 'lie in prison all the days of her life' than submit to the Queen, Mary sent for her sister at ten o'clock at night. Elizabeth was met by Sir Henry and Mrs Clarencius who led her through the garden to the foot of a staircase that led up to the queen's lodging. Here most of Elizabeth's attendants were told to wait, and Bedingfield and Mrs Clarencius with one of Elizabeth's women accompanied Elizabeth to the queen's presence. Foxe does not make it clear whether Mrs Clarencius remained for the interview, though her presence for the queen's betrothal interview with Renard suggests this might have been the case. Foxe does tell us that 'it is thought that king Philip was there behind a cloth', reminiscent of Polonius behind the arras.

Further evidence of Susan Clarencius' importance comes from a Venetian diplomat, Giovanni Michieli. On returning to Venice at the end of his mission in May 1557 Michieli gave the customary report to the Venetian Senate on the state of

⁶¹ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of the English Church*, ed. G. Townsend and S.R. Cattley (1838) vol.8 pp. 621-623

England.⁶² A long description of the land and its government was followed by an account of the queen herself. Michieli concluded by endeavouring to persuade the Senate that he should be allowed to retain the gifts he had received from Mary. The Queen, he said, had given him one thousand crowns of the sun, with her thanks for various presents and acts of courtesy to herself and her *cameria principale* Mistress 'Clarentia', and also a cup and two hundred crowns as a personal present. The ambassador went on to justify his keeping all this money, and at the same time emphasised the acquisitive side of Susan Clarencius' nature. The queen's chief gentlewoman had demanded various things from him for the Queen's 'need and service', which he had been obliged to supply at his own expense. The most notable of these things had been a coach and horses complete with its accoutrements which he had imported from Italy and used all that summer. This coach seems to have taken Mrs Clarencius' fancy. The Queen had asked Michieli for the coach, a request the unfortunate ambassador had been unable to refuse. The coach had then been presented to a no doubt suitably grateful Susan Clarencius. Michieli was even more put out because other Venetian ambassadors appointed just before himself had received an augmentation to their salary which he had not been given. It is tempting to speculate that the coach mentioned in the will of George White, Susan's nephew, nearly thirty years later might have been the same vehicle that Susan had manoeuvred out of the unfortunate Michieli.⁶³

What in a modern context might be called 'networking' was common behaviour for the Tudor upper classes, including women.⁶⁴ The correspondence of Honor Lady Lisle reveals many examples of influence and favours being sought both by and from Lady Lisle. No such body of correspondence remains for Susan Clarencius but there are two cases at least to illustrate the use of influence in her life also. As has been mentioned above, Mrs Clarencius was a customer of the merchant John Bedell. Having been arrested for his part in the Dudley conspiracy, Bedell

⁶² *Cal. S. P. Venetian* vol. 6ii pp. 1043-85

⁶³ The editor of *State Papers Venetian* ingeniously but incorrectly identified 'Mistress Clarence' as Katherine Pole, Countess of Huntingdon on the grounds of her descent from George Duke of Clarence. There can be no doubt that Michieli was really referring to Susan Clarencius. The will of George White of Hutton is Essex Record Office Ms. 15 ER 15.

⁶⁴ Barbara J. Harris 'Women and Politics in early Tudor England' *Historical Journal* 33 (1990) pp. 259-281

remembered his important client. In a long letter, desperately asking his wife to get help for him, he reminded her that Mistress Clarencius had bought his 'fyne clothe' and urged her to 'move mistress Clarenceau for me'. Whether or not Mrs Bedell did see Mrs Clarencius, and whether Mrs Clarencius felt able to beg the Queen for mercy on Bedell's behalf, it was to no avail. Bedell was duly executed for his treason.⁶⁵ Another of those involved in the conspiracy was Lord Bray. Despite the fact that he was 'an unkind husband', Lady Bray appealed for his release from the Tower. She appeared before the Queen, who apparently pitied her situation and commented that 'God sent oftentimes to good wives, bad husbands'. Lady Bray was treated with sympathy by both Mrs 'Sturley' (Strelly) and by Susan Clarencius, who invited her to dine with her, taking her hand encouragingly as they walked to Susan's room. Whether or not the intervention by the ladies played any part, Bray was finally pardoned for his part in the conspiracy.⁶⁶

Just as Bedell asked Susan Clarencius for help, so it is likely that Susan asked others to help her. In the Talbot Papers there is a letter signed simply 'Susan C' which was probably written by Mrs Clarencius.⁶⁷ It is written from St James Palace to the Earl of Shrewsbury, by someone on friendly terms with him. The edge of the paper is torn and it is possible that the 'C' may originally have been the beginning of the name Clarencius, although the initial could have stood alone. The writer asks the earl for his help to her servant Rowland Ackthroppe, the bearer of the letter. Ackthroppe claimed two houses in the manor of Sostelye, currently occupied by someone else. Susan C thought his right was undisputed, and asked the earl for his influence with the sheriff of Derby in the matter. The letter is written by a clerk but the signature is in a different, italic, hand and could be holograph, giving some evidence for Susan's literacy

There are other minor glimpses of Susan during Mary's reign. She sent her greetings to Courtenay in February 1556, in a letter written by William Ryce.⁶⁸ The

⁶⁵ P.R.O. S.P. 11/7/57; David Loades, *The Tudor Court* (2nd ed. Bangor 1992) p.133; David Loades, *Two Tudor Conspiracies* (2nd ed. Bangor 1992) for the Dudley conspiracy and Bedell's role in it.

⁶⁶ John Strype, *Ecclesiastical memorials* . . . (Oxford 1822) vol. 3 pt.1 pp. 546-549; David Loades, *Two Tudor Conspiracies*, pp. 228, appendix 4

⁶⁷ Lambeth Palace Library Ms 3194 f. 207, formerly Talbot Papers C f. 207

⁶⁸ *Cal. S. P. Venetian* vol. 6 (1) pp. 355-356

following year, during the campaign in France, she was able to give Margaret Countess of Bedford news of her husband's 'valiantness' during the campaign in France.⁶⁹ Her involvement with the Princess Mary's shopping years before may be reflected by a rather odd item for the Great Wardrobe accounts for St. James' Day 1558, when Susan took delivery of a batch of flags or banners, including designs of a unicorn, a greyhound and an image of the Blessed Virgin. The flags were presumably for a special mass or procession for the saint's day, but exactly why they delivered to Mrs Clarencius is not clear.⁷⁰

Since Mrs Clarencius left no personal correspondence, we unfortunately have little evidence of her feelings for her mistress. We can only speculate that she shared the queen's joy at the prospect of childbirth and her grief when those hopes proved false. Similarly we have no real evidence of Susan's religious beliefs apart perhaps from her purchase of the painting of the passion though we can surely assume that she shared Mary's devotion to the Catholic faith. Certainly Susan's cousins the Tyrells were noted for their religious conservatism. Sir Henry, as a justice of the peace in Essex was involved in various cases of persecution of Protestants, and Susan's more distant cousin Edmund Tyrell of Beeches was singled out for opprobrium by Foxe who called him 'an assister . . . to cruel murderers of God's saints'.⁷¹

Just as we have no evidence of Susan's feelings for her mistress during her life, so we have no evidence for her grieving for the queen at her death. Again we can surely assume that she did grieve. The dying Mary was surrounded by her women. Foxe reports a scene from her death bed which gave rise to the most familiar comment attributed to Queen Mary. The dying queen, says Foxe, was sighing. Her councillors thought she sighed for the absent Philip, and asked her if this was the case. The queen admitted that this was one cause, but not the 'greatest wound that pierceth my oppressed mind'. She refused to confide any further in her council, but later, when perhaps the councillors had withdrawn, she turned to Mrs Clarencius and 'master Rise'. These two according to Foxe were 'most familiar with her and most bold about her'. They questioned the queen further about her grief, and she told them that she sighed not only for Philip but also for the loss of Calais, for 'when I am

⁶⁹ *H.M.C. Hatfield Salisbury Papers* vol.1 p.142 no.532

⁷⁰ P.R.O. L.C.9/52/21

⁷¹ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* vol. 7 pp.118 (Henry), 328-335 (Edmund)

dead and opened, you shall find Calais lying in my heart'. Foxe claimed to have heard the tale from those who heard it from Master Rise himself. Whether or not Foxe was telling the truth, or embroidering on some second hand account of the royal death bed, it is significant that he chose to place Mrs Clarencius at the centre of the story.⁷²

Bearing in mind the closeness between mistress and servant during the queen's life, we can surely expect Susan to have been present at the queen's death. We know that soon after Mary's death Susan was apparently present at the 'cering' of the corpse. She later reported on the use of several packs of documents, in fact unsigned papers relating to Gresham's financial plans, to wrap or pack the body into its coffin.⁷³

Mary's funeral did not take place for nearly a month after her death. She was attended then by many of the ladies and gentlewomen who had attended her in life, including of course Mrs Clarencius. A group of these women were given white 'heads' and two ells of holland cloth at five shillings the ell for the funeral itself. The whole of the queen's household, including the humblest menials, were given black mourning liveries. The mourning provided included also an allowance of 'trappours' or coverings for a horse. The list of gentlewomen begins as might be expected with Mrs Clarencius.⁷⁴

The death of the Queen left Susan Clarencius without an obvious role to play. There would have been no question of her continuing as mistress of the robes with the new queen Elizabeth had her own household members waiting in the wings, just as Mary's own servants had filled her household when she became Queen. Susan seems to have begun her plans for the future some time before Mary's death, though these plans may have been more generally intended to secure the future of her heirs. By 1557 Susan Clarencius is likely to have been at least fifty, and had no children. Her heirs were her nephews George, John and Humphrey White, the sons of her brother Richard. To secure their rights she set up a use, in the name of Sir Francis Englefield, master of the Court of Wards, William Cordell master of the rolls, her cousin Edmund Tyrell and others, giving Susan the use of her properties for life, with the remainder to her heirs.⁷⁵ Each manor had a different remainder; George would

⁷² Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* vol. 8 pp. 624-625

⁷³ Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor* p. 350

⁷⁴ P.R.O. LC 2/4 (2) An Accompte of the Buryall of the late Quene Mary

⁷⁵ *Cal. Pat. Rolls P. & M.* vol. 4 pp. 50-51

receive Runwell and Rivenhall; John, Chingford Paul; and Humphrey, Chingford Comitis. The brothers were named successively as heirs for each manor, and the residuary heirs in each case were Sir Henry Tyrell and his heirs. Having thus secured her property as she wanted, Susan seems to have actually transferred the ownership of the properties to the White brothers soon after the Queen's death, when she made her own final plans. Certainly by 1560 the manor of Runwell was owned by George White.⁷⁶ Susan had been able to build up a substantial holding of land in the area where it would be most beneficial to her nephews, and by transferring the lands to them now she would be able to ensure that they did not lose the lands if the new government decided to confiscate the estates of those who chose to go into exile.

Sir Francis Englefield, one of the holders of Susan's use, was a member of Mary's household, and this illustrates another facet of life at court, the way that friendships formed among the colleagues working there. The will of Robert Strelley gives further proof of this. It is possible that Strelley was a relation of Susan's, since her brother Richard had married Margaret Strelley (or Shirley) of Nottinghamshire. Whether or not there was any connection, Frideswide Strelley (formerly Knight) was a colleague of Susan's of long standing. When Robert was in his last illness he appointed a group of executors, mostly members of the royal household, including his wife and Susan Clarencius, the only other woman. A few days later, at the point of death, he changed his mind, making Frideswide the sole executor. He asked the displaced executors to be 'aiders and assisters to her', and the document was signed by witnesses, including only two of the original executors, Susan and one other. The presence of Susan at this point suggests that she was with Frideswide at the deathbed, since Robert died shortly afterwards.⁷⁷

A more significant friendship was also formed within the royal household, this time with the much younger Jane Dormer.⁷⁸ When the Count of Feria arrived in England in Philip's train he looked 'with particular affection' on Jane Dormer and she returned his feelings, though the couple were not married until after the death of the Queen, in December 1558. The Count of Feria needed to remain in London for some

⁷⁶ *Cal. Pat. Rolls Elizabeth* vol.1 p. 365

⁷⁷ *Cal. Pat Rolls P. & M.* vol. 3 pp. 265-70

⁷⁸ Henry Clifford, *The Life of Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria*, ed. J. Stevenson (London 1887)

time to clear up King Philip's affairs, and did not leave for the Netherlands until the end of April or the middle of May.⁷⁹ By this time Jane was already about four months pregnant, and Mrs Clarencius had become a member of her household. The Venetian ambassador Il Schifanova reported on this, though describing Mrs Clarencius as the Countess's mother. Jane herself did not leave until about August (Clifford describes her as seven months pregnant when she took her farewell of Queen Elizabeth) and Susan Clarencius accompanied her to Malines.⁸⁰ The baby, Lorenzo, was born at Malines before 14 October when the Count de Feria reported the birth to his successor the Bishop of Aquila.⁸¹ Jane was ill after the birth, and a few weeks later the Count wrote that Mrs Clarencius 'has the entire care of the child and is wonderfully attentive'. Jane's grandmother Lady Dormer was also in the party, and a charming picture is given of the two old ladies doting on the infant.⁸² There is no suggestion here that the child was not held in affection, even if the parents were not doing the actual childminding.

Susan's presence with the Feria party gave the Count some problems. It was necessary for an English subject wishing to travel abroad to have a licence. Susan could not have been ignorant of the rules - her disposal of her property suggests she knew the risks involved in leaving the country - but she either omitted to obtain a licence or else had one of only short duration. Perhaps she considered her presence in the ambassadorial, aristocratic Feria household sufficient protection. It is noticeable that her name does not appear in the General Pardon granted at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, whereas that of her friend and former colleague Frideswide Strelley does,⁸³ as does the name of George White of Hutton. Similarly, 'old Lady Dormer' did not have a licence to travel either, and the Count put much effort into attempting to obtain the licences.⁸⁴ In the same letter in which he reported the birth of a son, he asked the Bishop of Aquila to see about getting a licence for both Lady Dormer and

⁷⁹ *Cal. S.P. Venetian* vol. 7 p. 93 This despatch, dated 30th May 1559, refers to Feria's leaving a fortnight before. However c.f. Loades, *Mary Tudor* p. 309 which gives Feria's departure as taking place in April.

⁸⁰ Clifford, *Jane Dormer* p.109

⁸¹ *Cal. S. P. Span. Elizabeth* vol. 1 p.106

⁸² *Cal. S. P. Span.Eliz.* vol. 1 p.109-110

⁸³ *Cal. Pat Rolls Elizabeth* vol. 1 p.192

⁸⁴ For Feria's efforts to get the licences see *Cal. S. P. Span. Eliz.* vol. 1 pp.106, 109-111, 116-117; *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz.* 1559-1560 pp. 438-441, 487-189

'Clarencis' allowing them to stay away another six months. He suggested that the Bishop speak to 'Lord Robert and his sister' for help, but warned against applying to Cecil who he considered would oppose it. The request for a licence was repeated in other letters including one which revealed the real worry. Under Spanish protection at the highest level, the old ladies might be physically safe themselves, but their resources back in England were not. Lady Dormer intended to give 20,000 ducats to Jane and her husband, and de Feria feared that her son would endeavour to prevent this. If the licence was not received by Christmas, he believed, the Council would confiscate Lady Dormer's property, and he would lose Jane's inheritance. Even Mrs Clarencius, with much less property to be concerned with, and no angry son, was at risk. The count feared that Cecil, whom he called a knave, wished to take the opportunity to seize her goods.⁸⁵

The search for the licences dragged on for some time, though the sources are somewhat inconsistent. At some point in November 1559 the Count de Feria wrote to the Bishop of Aquila thanking him for the licence which was hand, though without specifying for whom the licence was obtained. However correspondence in March 1560 suggested that no licence had in fact been issued. By this time the Ferias were in Brussels taking a formal leave of the Regent, and the English envoy in that city, Sir John Legh, reported to Queen Elizabeth that the Count 'took great unkindness that the Queen denied him licence for the Lady Dormer's longer tarrying here and for Clarencyus going into Spain'.⁸⁶ On the same day coincidentally Thomas Gresham wrote to William Cecil telling him that the Count of Feria believed he (Gresham) had brought letters from the Queen denying a licence to old lady Dormer and Mrs Clarencius. Gresham insisted that he had no such letters, but he asked Cecil that if such a licence was granted, he should be the person to give it to the Count. He repeated the request a few weeks later.⁸⁷ Clearly Gresham who was surely a well-informed observer, did not consider the issue of a licence unlikely, and saw no danger in being associated with Mrs Clarencius. The matter of the licence was not finally settled until the end of 1560. By that time the issue had been taken up at the highest level. The Queen herself, writing to King Philip, explained why she felt it

⁸⁵ *Cal. S.P. Span. Eliz.* vol.1 pp.110-111

⁸⁶ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz.* pp. 438-9

⁸⁷ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz* vol.1 pp. 440-441, 487

impossible to grant licences for old Lady Dormer and Mrs Clarencius to leave the kingdom. The matter, she said, was a trifle in itself, but might lead to results prejudicial to the realm. In an accompanying letter to Sir Thomas Chamberlain, English ambassador to Spain, Elizabeth added that such licences were without precedent. Graciously, and to show that she harboured no ill feeling to her sister's servant, she also added 'if they will return and live quietly they will have her favour'⁸⁸.

Mrs Clarencius however had no intention of returning to England at present, quietly or otherwise. She had remained in or around Malines from the birth of Jane Dormer's son until about the beginning of March 1560. Jane had been unwell following her delivery, but even in the best of conditions the process of childbirth could not be rushed.⁸⁹ In November, when thanking the Bishop of Aquila for the licence, the Count de Feria had expressed his intention to travel as soon as Jane was fit. In fact they waited until the end of the winter, and then made a semi-royal progress stopping first at Brussels where they were entertained to dinner and supper by the Regent ⁹⁰ They then journeyed on through France, reaching the French court at Amboise on April 28. The Feria party included various English Catholics who took the opportunity to visit the ambassador Sir Nicholas Throckmorton and stress their continuing loyalty to Queen Elizabeth. Reporting the incident to his mistress Throckmorton commented that 'Mistress Clarentius also sent to him'.⁹¹ Whether Mrs Clarencius was too grand to visit the ambassador personally, too busy tending to Don Lorenzo de Feria, or considered it inappropriate, the ambassador does not comment. Clearly though the former mistress of the robes was sufficiently important for her greeting to be a matter of concern to Queen Elizabeth. From Amboise the Feria party had continued their journey into Spain, and by December 1560 they were in residence there, first in Madrid and later at Safra.

During her period in Spain Susan Clarencius and her activities continued to be of interest to the English ambassadors and agents there. Both Sir Thomas Chamberlain and his replacement Sir Thomas Challoner mentioned her in their

⁸⁸ *Cal. S.P. Foreign Eliz.* pp. 440, 488-489

⁸⁹ Adrian Wilson 'The ceremony of childbirth' in Valerie Fildes, *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England* (London 1990)

⁹⁰ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1559-1560* pp. 438-439

⁹¹ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1559-1560* p. 596

correspondence and sent her greetings.⁹² However relations with someone living in unlicensed exile in Spain did carry some risk. Jane Baillie, a servant of the Countess of Lennox, wrote a letter to Mrs Clarencius which was carried to the Continent together with letters from the Countess to the Countess of Feria and lord 'Awbeny'. Margaret Countess of Lennox had spent much of her youth at the English court, and had been chief mourner at Mary's funeral where perhaps Jane Baillie and Susan Clarencius had become acquainted. But the bearer of the letters, Ralph Lacy, was captured and interrogated about the messages he carried. In his statement he said that in Turin he had shown the letters for the Countess of Feria to one Ramsey, and left those letters together with the letters to Mrs Clarencius 'in his chamber". Whether in Lacy's chamber or Ramsey's is not made clear, but obviously Susan did not receive those particular greetings. It should be remembered that the Ferias had met Mary Queen of Scots in Amboise, and Jane de Feria corresponded with her, while the Countess of Lennox was the mother of Henry Lord Darnley. There was matter here at least to arouse the curiosity if not the suspicion of the English authorities.⁹³

Just as contacts with English exiles in Spain could arouse suspicion, so living in Spain could cause problems for exiles unused to the ways of that country, and especially of the Inquisition. An episode from the autumn of 1562 illustrates this and also illustrates one of the less pleasant aspects of Susan Clarencius' personality. In September 1562 an English woman arrived at the port of Bilbao to work as a maid for Mrs Clarencius, possibly accompanied by a young man also come to join her service.⁹⁴ No indication is given of the woman's age or name, or where she came from. We know that she brought with her a chest containing her possessions. When the ship arrived the young man contacted John Cuerton, the English agent in Bilbao (or was contacted by him) and Cuerton gave him correspondence and two firkins of butter for the ambassador Challoner, as well as letters for Challoner to pass to Mrs

⁹² e.g. *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1561-1562* pp. 589-190; *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1562* pp.458, 489

⁹³ *Cal. S.P. Foreign Eliz 1562* pp202-204; see Clifford, *Jane Dormer* pp.116, 118 for Jane's relations with Mary Queen of Scots. See also Goldsmith, *All the Queen's women* p. 93 for relations between Lady Lennox and Queen Elizabeth.

⁹⁴ The tale of the maid unfolds through a series of letters written by Cuerton and Challoner between September 1562 and April 1563, to be found in *Cal. S. P. Foreign*.

Clarencius.⁹⁵ Probably it had been intended that the young man and the maid servant should travel to Madrid together. However the port authorities searched the woman's luggage, no doubt routinely, and discovered a book which was considered heretical. The book was probably an old missal, but as Cuerton reports 'in the calendar of which were blotted the names of the Pope and Saint Thomas of Canterbury'.⁹⁶ This would have been done at some time after 1534 to satisfy the new rules after the promulgation of the Royal Supremacy. Perhaps the poor woman, unable to afford a new book, had defaced the old one to conform with the law, and gone on using it through the Catholic reign of Mary. Perhaps she had simply had no idea that the book would cause trouble in Spain. Perhaps, or perhaps not. Cuerton, when he had begun to look into the problem, considered that the fault lay not with the woman but with 'the young man, Thomas' who he said had put the offending book into the woman's coffer, maybe to avoid punishment himself.⁹⁷

Cuerton's initial response to the case was one of irritation. He managed to talk the authorities at Bilbao out of imprisoning the woman, but could not prevent the impounding of the chest and its contents. He commented crossly to Challoner that he would not again interfere to protect those who brought in illegal books, suggesting that he might have had to do this before.⁹⁸ However as Cuerton investigated the case further he became convinced that the maid was innocent, and wrote to Mrs Clarencius somewhat stiffly to suggest she was failing in her duty in this matter.⁹⁹ It is clear that Mrs Clarencius' reaction to this embarrassing case had been to wash her hands of it and allow the unfortunate woman to take her chances with the Inquisition. She had written to Cuerton suggesting that the maid should get herself a position in Bilbao until her nephew Humphrey White came out of England, for Clarencius would not 'be at more charges with her'. Susan's idea appears to have been that the maid should return to England with White. Cuerton, with more knowledge of Spain than Susan, thought the girl's chances of getting a position in Spain were slight: 'the pepul be after a nodr sort'. He was also more anxious than Susan appeared to be about the

⁹⁵ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz 1562* p.342

⁹⁶ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1562* p.317

⁹⁷ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz 1562* p.364

⁹⁸ P.R.O. SP 70/41/243 (*Cal. S.P. Foreign Eliz 1562* p.317)

⁹⁹ S.P. 70/42/187 (*Cal S. P. Foreign Eliz 1562* p.364)

risks of the involvement of the inquisition.¹⁰⁰ Challoner however interceded for the maid with the Inquisitor Major, the Archbishop of Seville who agreed to favour her cause.¹⁰¹

Perhaps also as a result of Challoner's persuasion, Mrs Clarencius now agreed to pay something for the maid's keep. Meanwhile the impounded chest continued to be a problem. The Spanish had failed to give prices for the confiscated raiment as they were expected to do, or to give sureties 'for anything that might have been called for'. Not surprisingly the unfortunate maid, deprived of luggage and job, grew irritable, provoking Cuerton to comment that he wished she was in England.¹⁰² But Cuerton's strongest criticism was reserved for Susan Clarencius. In letters to Challoner he repeatedly blamed her for the trouble: it was a shame she did not look more after the matter of her maid: 'surely she is to blame for her'¹⁰³ and most damningly 'we think not much to Mistress Clarencis' worship or honesty'.¹⁰⁴ That final comment was made in the same letter in which Cuerton was at last able to report to his master that the unfortunate woman had sailed to England, after four wasted and doubtless very worrying months. Even then the case was not quite over. Challoner wrote diplomatically to Mrs Clarencius in April, some six weeks later, that he was 'in some perplexity' about the money she had given him. He believed she had given him £6 - he remembered a dozen demi-sovereigns - whereas her man said it had been £8. It looks as if Mrs Clarencius had been quibbling over the amount of money she had left with the ambassador to pay for the maid's keep.¹⁰⁵

One of the reasons Mrs Clarencius had left money with the ambassador was that she had accompanied the Count and Countess de Feria to Safra, in Andalusia, at first for the winter, though they remained there at least a year.¹⁰⁶ Despite the awkwardness of the dispute over the two pounds, and of the whole business of the maid, Challoner maintained good relations with Mrs Clarencius. In September 1563

¹⁰⁰ S P. 70/42/185 The *Calendar* is ambiguous whether the nephew is Susan's nephew or the maid's but the ms. makes clear that the nephew was in fact Humphrey White.

¹⁰¹ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1562* p. 374

¹⁰² *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1562* pp. 400, 445-446

¹⁰³ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1563* p. 31

¹⁰⁴ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1563* pp. 76-77

¹⁰⁵ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1563* p. 267

¹⁰⁶ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1563* p. 400

Damascene Stradling, another of Jane Dormer's ladies, wrote to Challoner passing on greetings from several of the household including Mrs Clarencius.¹⁰⁷ The following spring Challoner wrote effusively to Mrs Stradling, telling her that he had been granted his recall and asking her to commend him 'a thousand times' to Mrs Clarencius and Mrs Mary Semper.¹⁰⁸

This seems to be the last direct reference to Mrs Clarencius. Challoner was premature in announcing his recall, for he was still writing to the Feria household in November 1564, but though he wrote to the countess and to Mrs Stradling he sent no more commendations to Mrs Clarencius.¹⁰⁹ The supposition must be that either she had decided to return to England at last, or that she died sometime in spring 1564. Back in February 1562, soon after his appointment to Madrid, Challoner had written to Cecil 'Mrs Clarentius determineth shortly, as she saidth, to repair into England, first to Flanders, it skilleth not for her, good old woman, where she make an end of her days'.¹¹⁰ Clearly she had not acted on that impulse at the time, but would she have decided in 1564 to go back to England? Don Lorenzo de Feria was seriously ill in September 1563, and Susan would surely not have left the household until his fate was determined.¹¹¹ She was, as Challoner had patronisingly noted, an old woman, around sixty by now, and death in Spain sometime in spring 1564 seems the most likely answer.¹¹²

Back in Essex the White family continued to benefit from the fruits of Susan Clarencius' loyal service to Queen Mary. It is possible that active contacts had continued between the Whites and Susan while she lived in Spain. Certainly in 1562 Susan was anticipating a visit by her nephew Humphrey.¹¹³ However despite (or perhaps because of) these contacts the Whites gradually rearranged Susan's properties in ways which were more convenient for them. In April 1560 George White set up a use relating to the manor of Runwell.¹¹⁴ Like Susan he was mainly concerned with

¹⁰⁷ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1563* p. 524-5

¹⁰⁸ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1564-65* p. 68

¹⁰⁹ e.g. *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1564-65* pp. 167, 225, 237

¹¹⁰ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz. 1561-62* pp. 519-20

¹¹¹ *Cal. S. P. Foreign Eliz 1563* pp. 524-525

¹¹² Steer, *An Essex lady*, p. 98 suggests that Susan died 'about the year 1566' but gives no supporting evidence.

¹¹³ S.P. 70/42/185

¹¹⁴ *Cal. Pat. Rolls Eliz. vol. 1 1558-60* p. 365

lands in Essex and in 1562 he sold the Suffolk manor of Chepenhall, Susan's first acquisition, to Nicholas Barbour, described as yeoman, from the neighbouring village of Fresyngfeld.¹¹⁵ There was also some exchanging of manors between the White brothers. George took over Chingford St Paul from John in January 1562. The entry in the Patent Roll regarding this referred back to the holding of the land by Lord Darcy of Chiche, but made no mention of Mrs Clarencius, suggesting that she might be considered an undesirable association. Three years later George in turn passed this manor on to Humphrey, described as citizen and merchant tailor.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile in 1564 Humphrey had obtained a licence to sell Chingford Comitis to William Jefferson and Richard Abdey, and Jefferson's heirs.¹¹⁷ However this does not seem to have taken place for according to Morant in December 1571 Chingford Comitis was conveyed by Humphrey to John Branche.¹¹⁸

After these various transfers had been made, at the time of his death in 1584 George White of Hutton, gent. held the family lands at Hutton and Rawreth, and in addition Susan Clarencius's manors of Runwell, Rivenhall and Thundersley. In his will made shortly before he died he made no mention of the aunt who had contributed so substantially to his fortune.¹¹⁹ This is perhaps hardly surprising. Susan had been dead about twenty years, and even before her memory had faded it may have been an embarrassment to his family. George clearly acknowledged his loyalty to Queen Elizabeth in his will. His Aunt Susan had spent her last years defying the authority of that queen, and living in exile in a country which George by 1584 will have seen as hostile if not yet a declared enemy.

Some family links still continued. Edmund Tyrell of Beeches lived in the manor of Rawreth, where George held property, and did not die until 1576. George's will includes another Tyrell, 'my friend Thomas Tyrell'. Anne Lady Petre was godmother of George's son Richard, and remembered them both in her will.¹²⁰ Just as Sir William Petre had been Susan's friend, so Sir John Petre was George White's

¹¹⁵ *Cal. Pat. Rolls Eliz. vol. 2 1560-63* p. 200

¹¹⁶ *Cal Pat. Rolls Eliz.* p.380; *op. cit* vol.3 1563-66 p. 305

¹¹⁷ *Cal. Pat Rolls. Eliz. vol .3 1563-66* p. 128

¹¹⁸ Morant, *History . . . of Essex* p. 56

¹¹⁹ Essex Record Office 15 ER 15 Will of George White

¹²⁰ F.G. Emmison, *Elizabethan life: wills of Essex gentry and merchants* (Chelmsford 1978) p.34

friend and was appointed George's executor, as well as being left 'one of my best geldinges'.¹²¹

George White's will might make no acknowledgement of Susan Clarencius' part in establishing his fortune, but play a part she did. She seems to have followed a clear plan of acquiring land in Essex, surely with the intention of setting up an estate for her family. George White and his brothers may not have been of sufficient status for Mrs Clarencius to obtain them offices of state, but she certainly did her best for them. It can also fairly be said that she pursued her own interests; the incident of Michieli's coach is proof of that. Besides challenging part at least of Murphy's conclusion about Mary's ladies, the career of Susan Clarencius also confirm's Harris's views about the way elite women functioned in early Tudor England. None of this though detracts from Susan Clarencius' closeness to her royal mistress, and her loyal service for over twenty years.

¹²¹ E.R.O. 15 ER 15 (George White's will)

Chapter Eight

Sabine Johnson: 'goodwyf (but sometyme a shrowe)'¹

Our knowledge of Sabine Johnson (like our knowledge of Honor Lisle) comes largely from a family misfortune, in this case the bankruptcy of her husband John, and the subsequent confiscation of his family papers.² Sabine's husband John Johnson who maintained a regular correspondence with both his wife and his brother Otwell, was based mainly in Calais for the period of the letters. The letters have a strong personal element which allows us to learn much about Sabine Johnson's life and activities as a woman whose life was mainly 'private' and domestic though it encompassed a good deal of 'public' activity in the sense of dealing with her husband's business affairs. This chapter will begin with a brief biographical sketch of Sabine and her family, while the main part of it will study Sabine's life thematically, based on evidence from the Johnson Papers.

Sabine was one of the twelve children of Thomas Saunders, a Northamptonshire gentleman, and his wife Margaret (whom Foxe called 'a gentlewoman of good estimation').³ To call Sabine an aristocrat is stretching the definition of that word, but she was certainly a gentlewoman. One of her brothers, Edward, became a judge and chief baron of the exchequer, while another, Laurence, became a priest and eventually a martyr.⁴ Other brothers entered the law, farmed or became merchants. Of her sisters we know little, apart from the details of their marriages. Thomas Saunders died in 1528 when Sabine was still only a child, and her

¹ John to Sabine, May 1st 1545, at the time of the row over William Pratt

² The bulk of the Johnson Papers are in P.R.O. State Papers Supplementary, S P. 46 vols. 5, 6 and 7. Others are distributed through S.P.1. The Johnson papers were the subject of a thesis by Barbara Winchester in 1953 (*The Johnson Letters*, 4 vols, London University Ph. D. 1953) hereafter cited as Winchester thesis. The thesis includes a transcription of the letters. Winchester also published a popular version of volume 1 of her thesis (without any references) as *Tudor Family Portrait* (London, 1955). In most cases references and quotations from the Johnson Papers use my own transcriptions from the originals. Where this is not the case a reference is given to the Winchester thesis as well the P.R.O. number.

³ John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments . . . of the Christian Church*, ed. G. Townsend and S. R. Cattley, (London 1838) vol. 6, p. 612

⁴ See *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 50, pp.322-3, 327 for Edward and Laurence Saunders.

mother Margaret married Robert Chauntrell, referred to by Sabine as 'my father'. We know nothing of Sabine's childhood, except that she learnt to read and write. Thomas and Margaret Saunders seem to have used the conventional practice of naming their children for saints, being unconventional however in their choice of patrons for some of their children. Edward, Robert and Jane were traditional enough names, and Joseph reflected the increased popularity of the Blessed Virgin's husband, but Laurence, Blaise and Ambrose were more unusual. Sabine though had the most unusual name of all, and her parents' reasons for the choice are unknown. There were at least three saints Sabina, and another eight named Sabinus, but we do not know which of these saints gave Sabine Saunders her name.⁵

Sabine Saunders spent part of her girlhood living in the household of her maternal uncle Anthony Cave, at Tikeford in Northamptonshire not far from her mother's home at Sibbertoft. Cave, a merchant of the Staple and a prosperous man, took Sabine's brother Ambrose as his apprentice as well as giving a home to Sabine. Another of Cave's apprentices was John Johnson, son of a Calais merchant and a friend of Cave's

We know nothing of Sabine and John's courtship, but their subsequent relationship suggests that although their marriage was evidently seen as suitable by their families, it may also have been a love match. The young couple were married about 1541, when Sabine was around 20. Thomas Saunders had left 100 marks for each of his children, and Sabine's grandfather Richard Cave had also left Margaret Chauntrell a hundred marks for her children's marriages, so Sabine did not go empty handed to her wedding.⁶ John had become a freeman of the Drapers' Company in 1534, and was probably a freeman of the City of London by 1536, so though he was still Cave's assistant, he was becoming a substantial figure in his own right as a merchant of the Staple.⁷ Like Sabine he had some money: a legacy from his father of £54 10s had grown to £60 by 1536, and he also had a little land in Calais perhaps including the Ship Inn.⁸

⁵ See e.g. Dom Bede Millard ed. *The Book of Saints* (6th ed. London 1989)

⁶ Barbara Winchester, *The Johnson Letters*, (London Ph.D. thesis 1953), vol. 1, p. 303, citing P.C.C. wills 44 Mellershe and 18 Dyngeley

⁷ Winchester, thesis vol. 1, p. 31

⁸ Winchester, thesis vol. 1, p. 33

By early 1542 John was renting the parsonage of Polebroke, also in Northamptonshire, from Sabine's cousin Thomas Saxby, the incumbent. The rent for the house and glebe land, with the right to the tithes of wheat, hay, milk, chickens and calves, was £3 6s 8d. There were hidden costs though, as Saxby explained when he listed to John all the cheese making equipment he would need to deal with the tithe milk: ' a chesse press . . . lynon clothys to pute the chessys yn, dyvers panys for mylke . . . babelleis to gether alle yore mylke yn' and even a horse and cart to collect the milk from the farms⁹ John was soon well equipped. A tax assessment of 1543 rated him as worth £30 in goods, but described him unambitiously as 'yoman'.¹⁰ John however had grand ideas, ordering a fancy bed 'of the facion of Mr Armigille's' based on that of his friend Armigill Wade, which had cost twenty shillings for the bedstead alone, let alone the hangings.¹¹ The young couple wanted to make a show, but they seem often to have been short of ready money.

By early 1544 the Johnsons had decided to move from Polebroke to Glapthorn, on the other side of Oundle. Glapthorn was a larger place with the opportunity for John to farm in addition to his trading activities. Here his social pretensions increased. In the tax assessment of 1545 he was described as 'gent.' in comparison to the 'yoman' of two years earlier, but the value of his goods had fallen from thirty pounds to twenty-four.¹² In comparison with the other inhabitants of the village he would still seem a wealthy man, the two other richest inhabitants being valued at only ten pounds. Glapthorn belonged to Lord Cromwell (Gregory, son of the late lord Privy Seal) but was part of lands rented by Sir Thomas Brudenell of Dene. Anthony Cave offered to put in a good word with Brudenell: 'I am but smally acquaynted wt hym but I know hym and I thynke he knows me'.¹³ John and Sabine seem to have been on friendly terms with Brudenell, since once when Sabine wished to avoid an unwelcome visitor she proposed to spend the day with the Brudenells.¹⁴ Though they lived at Glapthorn, the Johnsons kept on the lease of the parsonage at

⁹ Winchester, thesis vol. 2, p.10 [S.P. 1/243 f183]

¹⁰ P.R.O. E.179/156/187 All mss. sources cited are in the P. R. O. unless otherwise stated.

¹¹ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 20 [S. P.1/244/4]

¹² E.179/156/209

¹³ S. P.1/183/26

¹⁴ S. P.1/211/192

Polebroke, and visited their earlier house from time to time. John spent much of his time in Calais, leaving Sabine at home in the country. Here she was able to exercise her skills at housewifery and farm management, being treated as John's deputy with authority to take at least some decisions.

During the period covered by the letters Sabine gave birth to five children, three daughters and two sons, one of whom died within a few weeks of birth. The letters give a good indication of the anticipation of birth and the response to it. The youth of the children means that we know nothing of the education of the young Johnsons but there are enough references to gain some indication of Sabine's attitude to her children and the child-rearing methods she used, which will be considered below

Otwell Johnson, John's brother, plays a leading part in the correspondence. Otwell, like his elder brother John, was a member of the Drapers' Company, but unlike John he was normally based in London. He ran the London end of the Johnsons' business which entailed almost constant correspondence with his brother in Calais, occasional letters to Sabine in the country, and much sending of parcels and money back and forth. Though Otwell was the younger brother and junior partner, in Barbara Winchester's view he was 'really the more able of the two', a fact which helped to lead to the disintegration of the business after his sudden death in 1551.¹⁵

Otwell died of the sweat, and his death plunged John into depression, worsened by the fact that he himself succumbed to the illness. Otwell's place in the business was taken by the third Johnson brother, Richard, and Sabine's brother Ambrose Saunders. Neither had the expertise of Otwell, and the firm made a series of rash decisions and investments. These led finally to John being declared bankrupt in 1553¹⁶ which in turn led to the confiscation and preservation of John's papers up to that year. The years that followed the bankruptcy would appear to have been painful ones for John who refers to his 'misery' in a letter to Cecil,¹⁷ and his attempts to rebuild his life will be examined below. However the absence of the intimate husband - wife correspondence of the earlier period means that there is very little information about Sabine after 1553. The last reference to Sabine appears to be in her brother

¹⁵ Barbara Winchester, *Tudor Family Portrait* (London 1955) p. 273

¹⁶ see below, p. 274

¹⁷ Cecil Mss. vol.1 no.125 [microfilm copy in British Library]

Edward's will, written on the tenth of November 1576.¹⁸ There is no evidence of Sabine's death, or whether she predeceased her husband. In 1587 her son Evangelist had a daughter who was named Sabine after her grandmother, but whether Sabine ever saw her granddaughter is not known. Though the biographical details for the first and last years of her life are thus sketchy, for a brief period from 1543 to 1551 we can build up a vivid picture of the way Sabine Johnson lived, and this study will concentrate largely on this period.

It has already been suggested that John and Sabine's marriage, while undoubtedly one approved by their friends, may have been a love match. The letters between them contain no passages of grand passion, but several indications of a happy and comfortable intimacy, as well as others suggesting that relations between them were temporarily strained. Sometimes the intimacy is very marked, as when John writing while going to bed at ten o'clock at night wishes 'ye were in my bed to tarry me' or when Sabine a few weeks later, in November, wishes 'whan it shall please God to send you hom, I pot no dowtes but that we shall agree wary well this cold nyghtes'.¹⁹ John teased her a little at times, as when he raised the spectacle of fair widows in Calais who would be glad to have him, but then regretted that he could not cope with many women, 'for I have moche ado to please you alone, as ye knowe'.²⁰ Sometimes Sabine may have complained about John's absences in Calais, for in the same letter that he lovingly ended longing for her beside him he also insisted that 'i maie not be no more shrodely spoken to nor yet curstly loked on'.²¹ Nor when there was a dispute did he automatically take her side.²²

Sometimes Sabine decided to take action to deal with her yearning for John's company. In June 1551, for example, Sabine asked John whether he would join her at home, or whether she should go to Calais to see him. Her letter suggests that she was equally prepared for either event, and does not seem to have regarded her journey as a major enterprise. She may have been accompanied to London by Laurence Saunders, and she stayed with Otwell once she arrived there, but otherwise

¹⁸ P. C. C. 41 Carew

¹⁹ S. P. 46/5/139; Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 504 [S. P.1/211/32]

²⁰ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 493 [S. P.1/210/181]

²¹ S. P.46/5/139

²² See e.g. below, p.260

she seems to have undertaken her journey by herself.²³ On an earlier occasion, when John was ill, Sabine also went off to Calais on her own. Despite assurances from Otwell, Sabine did not believe that John was recovering, and insisted on dashing off to Calais 'at this instant'. Otwell and others tried to persuade her out of her rash journey, but Sabine would not be persuaded. Otwell also felt rather guilty about letting Sabine travel alone, but could not let his wife Maria accompany her, since she was not 'in case convenient thereunto'. In a postscript to his letter Otwell admitted that he might 'have played the fowle over myself with my syster' and gone to Calais himself. But his business was too urgent, and he considered it too dangerous for them both to travel in one ship, especially in November.²⁴ Sabine brought John home from Calais to Glapthorn, where she nursed him back to health, and where he stayed for many months before returning to his mercantile life.

The Johnsons were also concerned with the marriages of other people, and their involvement here illustrates the typical matter-of-fact Tudor attitude. Sabine's kinswoman Anne Saxby was left a widow, pregnant and with four small children. A few months previously, Sabine's sister Christian had also died, leaving her husband Christopher Breten, and more children. Sabine and John decided to bring the bereaved families together, and Sabine visited Anne taking with her a letter from John making the proposal. Anne insisted that 'she had a husband that dyd love her so well as a man cold love his wife' and she did not wish to take another that 'wold not love har and her cheldrene'. Sabine in turn put Breten's case, describing Christopher's 'onest behavior to his wife'. Anne refused to commit herself, saying that 'she wold not set her mynd to no man tell she was delyvered and churched'.²⁵ The practical Sabine clearly thought Anne should not be so fastidious, and talked of sending Parson Saxby (another cousin) to see Anne, thinking he could persuade her.²⁶ A few months later Anne Saxby did indeed marry Christopher Breten. At least Sabine did take Anne's

²³ S. P.46/6/154

²⁴ S. P.46/5/175

²⁵ Anne's reluctance to marry again while still pregnant accords with conventional views on this such as those of 'T.E.' who thought it 'wanton'. 'T.E.' *The Lawes Resolutions of Women's Rights* pp. 328-329. See above p. 80. Though reference is made to Anne Saxby's churching here, no reference is made to any of Sabine's churchings, making it impossible to deduce her feelings about the subject.

²⁶ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 396 [S. P. 1/207/120]

feelings into account, though her own behaviour in pushing a prospective husband onto a pregnant widow seems to lack delicacy.²⁷ However Anne Saxby was far from unusual in remarrying. Half of the women widowed in Abingdon in the second half of the sixteenth century remarried, and nearly three quarters of younger widows.²⁸

As indicated above, Sabine had five children during the period of the letters. Charity her eldest child was born probably in 1542, Rachel in 1544, a son in 1546, Faith in 1548 and Evangelist in 1550, while another son Edward was born after the letters finish. She may also have had two other daughters born late in the 1550s or early 1560s, though the evidence for this is scanty.²⁹ Thus for much of the period of the letters Sabine will have been pregnant or recovering from giving birth. The activities she managed to accomplish at the same time indicate that while some early Tudor women may have treated the event of childbirth with great seriousness, they do not appear to have been unduly hampered by pregnancy. Travelling when pregnant may have been regarded as a problem, since Otwell was doubtful whether Sabine would be able to make the journey from Northamptonshire up to London for his wedding when she was in the early stages of pregnancy.³⁰ It should be noted though that Otwell's wedding had originally been planned to take place at Glapthorn, and no one seems to have thought that hosting the nuptials would be too much for Sabine. Similarly childbirth does not seem to have taxed Sabine overmuch. She was invited to pay a visit to her old friend Anthony Cave a mere four weeks after Faith's birth, the first possible point when Sabine might have left her chamber if she had observed the traditional four weeks lying-in.³¹ The pregnant woman of course had certain special

²⁷ John Johnson was also involved in trying to arrange a marriage between one John Jennyns and an unidentified widow, a neighbour of Anthony Cave's. On this occasion the putative bridegroom wanted to know if the widow was 'mete for him' and would be content to hear his suit. Cave promised to ascertain if the widow had any 'towardnes' but seemed doubtful of success, especially as she had 'a good lyvyng of the parsonage'. The outcome is unknown. S. P.46/6/127-8; S. P.46/7/50

²⁸ Barbara J. Todd 'The remarrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered' in Mary Prior ed. *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London 1985) pp. 60, 63 The figures are 50% total remarriages for widows whose husbands' wills were probated 1540-1599, 72.7 remarriages for wives whose first marriage lasted up to 10 years (i.e. those normally younger than 35) and 77.8% for those whose first marriage lasted 10-20 years.

²⁹ See below pp. 276-277

³⁰ S. P. 46/5/146

³¹ Winchester thesis vol. 2 no. 396 [S. P.1/207/120]

needs that might not be met locally, and Otwell's fiancée Maria Warner bought certain items such as laces 'for her belly' in London for Sabine. Otwell in his turn asked John (or perhaps Sabine) to buy on Maria's behalf 'spices such as she [Sabine] buyeth for herself, namely pepper, and chylbed jonkettes also' when Maria (now his wife) was herself pregnant.³² Otwell also asked Sabine about a 'grouening chayer' which she had been looking after for Maria. Thomas Raynald in his textbook on childbirth refers to a 'birthing stool' but suggests that such an item was not used in England. If this was a similar item perhaps it had been bought in Europe.³³

The letters contain no reference to the birth of Sabine's first child, Charity, which may have been in 1542, but it is possible that Otwell was her godfather since he calls her 'myn owne wenche'. Charity was about two at the time Otwell wrote this, and he commented wryly 'trusting . . . Charite increaseth goodly in her body if not in effect of her name'.³⁴ Charity was then still being breast fed, by a wet nurse in the nurse's own home. While Charity was still with the wet nurse, Sabine had conceived and borne another daughter. If Sabine was aware of the contraceptive value of breast feeding, she had not attempted to put it to the test. Though Charity was nursed away from home, Sabine was not indifferent to her daughter's welfare, and refers to her in letters to John 'I and your ij jewells be in healthe' she told John in May 1545.³⁵ Around this time Charity was weaned and came home to Glapthorn. A year later Charity had been sent away from home again, this time to the household of her uncle Christopher Breten, Sabine's brother-in-law. This may reflect the Tudor habit of sending children away from home, but at four Charity would seem rather young to be furthering her social education. There was plague in the area, but since Sabine had recently endured the loss of a baby son it is possible that the Bretens had offered to take Charity off her hands at this time. This is reinforced by John's half-apology for his 'veary bold deyd to trouble you and my sister wt her' and his thanks for the Bretens' 'gentell offere' to take Charity. Sabine, worried that the Bretens would spoil

³² S.P. 46/6/179. Pepper, which made the woman sneeze, was thought to help expel the baby. Eucharius Roeslin, *The Birth of Mankind* (translated and extended by Thomas Raynalde, 1545) in Joan Larsen Klein, ed. *Daughters Wives and Widows* (Urbana 1992) pp. 191-2.

³³ S.P. 46/6/179 ; See Thomas Raynalde, *The Birth of Mankind*, f. 58v., and also above p. 57

³⁴ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 73 [S. P.1/196/93]

³⁵ Winchester thesis vol.2, 266 [S. P.1/201/26]

her daughter, urged that the child should not be allowed to have her own way too much lest this should 'cause her to have strokes hereafter'. John also issued instructions about the child's diet. She should not have too much meat, for fear of warts to which the little girl was prone.³⁶ Uncle Breten reassured Charity's parents that she would not be allowed to be 'wanton', but insisted that she was no trouble to them, and in a later letter he added that 'the having of her is no payne but rather plesure'.³⁷ A few weeks later Sabine decided that she could cope with Charity again. There was now plague near the Bretens' and Sabine herself was staying with friends (perhaps her cousin Hatton) with a house full of children; 'Ther is at the lest xii or xiiij cheldren in the house besydes my cosen Hattens and myne'. Such a household would be a happy place for Charity who could play with all the cousins and friends.³⁸

There are fewer direct references to Sabine's other daughters than to Charity the eldest. Rachel was born in November 1544. Her Uncle Otwell had to deduce her name since the messenger had lost the vital piece of paper but remembered that the child was named for Jacob's wife in the Old Testament.³⁹ When Faith was born in 1548, Otwell made a jocular reference to the girls' names that John and Sabine had chosen, beseeching God ' within theis 12 monethes to send you hope, to yor fayethe and charitie, seing yowe are better practised at getting of wenches than boyes, but all be to godes glory '⁴⁰

The daughters were welcomed, but clearly Sabine and John wanted a son. In early July 1546, for example, Otwell hoped that Sabine's imminent child would be a boy.⁴¹ This time the wish was granted, and a son was born. Within a few weeks the infant (whose name is never given in the letters) was dead. Christopher Breten wrote a moving letter of condolence to his brother-in-law, at the same time revealing how parents might cope with such a loss in a time of high infant mortality. He regretted the loss of your 'littell fayre somer flowre', but urged the parents to treat this 'no other

³⁶ S. P. 46/5/112

³⁷ S. P. 1/224/19; S. P. 46/6/21

³⁸ Winchester thesis vol. 3, p. 787 [S. P. 1/225/164]

³⁹ S. P. 46/5/39

⁴⁰ S. P. 46/5/311

⁴¹ S. P. 46/5/165

wise but even as the losse of a floere'. Soon, he hoped, God who had taken this baby would restore to them another.⁴²

John was at home with Sabine for this birth. She had urged him to come home to 'bid gossips' in the middle of May, and in late June he had apologised to Cave for not seeing him because of 'my wyfe's laing downe'.⁴³ Unfortunately we have no indication of how either John or Sabine felt at the loss of the baby. They were together in the country for the first weeks of their grief, so wrote no letters to each other, and when John returned to London in September Sabine did not mention the baby. It would be unwise to infer from this that she did not mourn, and the removal of the lively Charity from the household for a few months suggests that her mother's nerves were strained.

In 1548 Sabine had another child, Faith, but in 1550 the longed-for healthy son was finally born. Facing her fifth lying-in in the course of some eight years, Sabine may have been feeling weary, or simply in need of congenial company, and invited her sister Jane Villiers to visit 'for her comforde'. Jane's absence caused confusion in her own household, but no doubt pleased Sabine.⁴⁴ It would appear that Jane stayed until the child, Evangelist, was born. His name, like Charity's and Faith's, reflects his parent's religious sympathies, but it is possible that the boy Evangelist (unlike Charity) was spoilt. Evangelist was probably his mother's favourite. After his birth Sabine and others would tend to name Evangelist when reporting the health of the household but refer only to 'the rest of your cheldrene' or 'wythe all your famele'. In a postscript to a letter of January 1552 Sabine asked John to buy shoes for Evangelist in London, and 'to cast away a lytell money of som babe for him'. She added, not trusting John's ability to buy a doll, that her sister Gery (John's sister, with whom he was staying) 'can do this thynges well'. This seems to be the only reference to such a toy for the children, and that the toy was for Evangelist is further indication of his special place in Sabine's heart.⁴⁵ Others spoilt the child as well. Richard Breten, Sabine's nephew, told his uncle John that 'Sargaunt' had begged a 'ram lam' for Evangelist from Anthony Cave.⁴⁶

⁴² S. P.1/223/2

⁴³ S. P.46/5/160; Winchester thesis vol.3, p. 706 [S. P.46/5/106]

⁴⁴ Winchester thesis vol.4, p.1097 [S. P.46/7/185]

⁴⁵ S. P.46/7/125

⁴⁶ 'Sargaunt' is not a clear identification, but probably refers to a servant named

Sabine's relationships with her extended family were warm and friendly. There were frequently visitors at Polebrook and Glapthorn, sometimes a full house. Thank-you letters recorded appreciation from Sabine's uncle Anthony Cave, her brother Robert Saunders, her cousin parson Saxby and her brother in law Christopher Breten among others.⁴⁷ At Whitsun 1545 for example Sabine entertained 'my brother Robart and my sister, my brother Breten, my brother Laurance and my cousin James'.⁴⁸ The Johnsons remained on close terms with Anthony Cave until the disaster of the bankruptcy, and there were often visits between the two households.⁴⁹

As still happens in some families, the Johnsons seem to have socialised more with Sabine's relations than with John's, but this was probably chance rather than deliberate choice. Otwell Johnson often stayed at Glapthorne, and Sabine at least once stayed with his wife Maria, journeying with her to Gravesend to see Otwell off to the Continent. Their return home was a nightmare, with long delays and dreadful company. Worst of all, the company was lousy, and quite openly picking lice off one another's clothes. Poor Maria 'was as well sped as the rest'.⁵⁰ The two sides of the family also mixed. Ambrose Saunders became a member of the Johnsons' business, while Robert Saunders acted as agent in a possible marriage proposal for Maria Johnson after Otwell's death.⁵¹

Sabine's 'brother parson' Laurence Saunders was a frequent visitor, coming the easy distance from Fotheringhay where he held a lectureship, or his rectory at Church Langton in Leicestershire. On at least one occasion Laurence was left in charge of overlooking the farm while John was away, though he regretted that he had been occupied with 'ernest and weyghtye affaires' which prevented him giving such attention as he might have done to the farm.⁵² He did though find time to preach at Polbroke, and to accompany his sister to London on the way to Richard Johnson's wedding.⁵³ Laurence had begun his career (after education at Eton and King's

Sergeant rather than Sabine's brother Mr Sergeant Saunders, though Edward was known as 'my brother Sergeant'. S. P.46/7/80 [Winchester vol. 4, p.1463]

⁴⁷ S. P. 46/7/31; S. P.46/7/51; S. P.46/7/63; S. P.1/217/172

⁴⁸ S. P.1/201/148

⁴⁹ S. P.46/5/305; S. P.46/5/312

⁵⁰ Winchester thesis vol. 3, p. 787 [S. P.1/225/164]

⁵¹ S. P.46/7/164

⁵² Winchester thesis vol. 3, p. 927 [S. P.46/5/226]

⁵³ S. P.1/201/94; S. P. 46/5/222

College Cambridge) by an apprenticeship to the merchant Sir William Chester. However the young man's religious enthusiasm had persuaded his master to release him from his indentures so that he could return to Cambridge where he studied Greek and Hebrew before being ordained priest. His leanings to reform led to his receiving preferment under Edward VI: a divinity lectureship at Fotheringhay College, not far from Glapthorn, followed by an appointment at Lichfield, and the rectory of Church Layton, in Leicestershire. In March 1553 he became rector of Allhallows, Bread Street, while retaining his country benefice.⁵⁴

According to Foxe, Laurence Saunders was urged to flee the country at Mary's accession but refused, though he was prevented from preaching in his country church. He returned to London in March 1554 and was arrested after preaching an aggressively anti-papist sermon. Laurence had married during King Edward's reign, and while in prison in the Marshalsea he defended the right of clergy to marry. Foxe described the touching scene when the gaoler brought his infant son Samuel to him (his wife having been forbidden to visit). Laurence declared that he would rather die than save his life by declaring the child a bastard and his wife a whore.⁵⁵

One of the ironic aspects of the Saunders family history is that while one brother was staunchly defending Protestantism, another was equally staunch a Catholic. Edward, much older than Sabine and Laurence, was rewarded for his constancy to the old faith by Queen Mary, being knighted and made chief justice of the Queen's Bench. Edward's promotion was not hindered by Laurence's heresy, and the elder brother tried in vain to help his younger sibling, though in a way that Laurence was not prepared to accept. While Laurence was in prison, Edward offered monetary help should it be needed, and also sent a copy of 'the meditation of St Bernard' in the hope that it would show his brother the error of his ways and help him return to Catholicism. Edward also begged Laurence to tell him 'wherin you cannot satisfy your conscience' in the hope of converting him.⁵⁶ Laurence of course refused to recant, and was burnt on 8th February 1555 in Coventry. By this time the Johnson correspondence had come to an end, so that we do not have a record of Sabine's response to the tragedy, which will surely have been one of the great griefs of her life.

⁵⁴ *D.N.B.* vol 50, 327; John Foxe *Acts and Monuments* vol. 6, pp.612-636

⁵⁵ Foxe, *op. cit.*, vol. 6, p.625

⁵⁶ Foxe, *op. cit.*, vol. 6, p.636

Edward Saunders continued to be a judge, and though under Elizabeth he was demoted to chief baron of the exchequer (perhaps because of a quarrel over jurisdiction with the admiralty court), otherwise he did not suffer for his religion.⁵⁷ During the period of the letters Sabine does not seem to have had a great deal of contact with Edward, but the Johnsons remained in touch with him after the bankruptcy. When in 1572 John applied to Lord Burghley to be taken into his service, he made a point of saying that he made his suit directly to the minister, 'wtout sewte of my lord Cheife Baron or other my frendes', thus establishing that his relationship with the chief baron was such that he could reasonably have used his influence⁵⁸

Edward Saunders seems to have been conscious of his duty to his family, and it may be assumed that he was in a position to afford to show this. In his will written on 10 November 1576,⁵⁹ Edward Saunders left his three living sisters each a memento of a piece of plate worth five pounds, or five pounds in money if they preferred. Barbara Winchester considered that since Edward's bequest was the only one to Sabine by her brothers, that Edward was therefore the only brother to show particular concern for his sister after the problems of the bankruptcy.⁶⁰ It is true that Edward mentioned 'my sister Johnson' in his will, and that neither Blaise nor Ambrose did. However it should be noted that neither Blaise nor Ambrose made any bequests to their siblings at all, so this cannot be seen as specifically excluding Sabine. Blaise made a very simple will leaving everything to his wife, and naming no other legatees. Ambrose was concerned about the precise descent of his lands, and the future of his children, including plans for his daughter's marriage. Like Blaise, he made no mention of his sisters. Since Blaise and Ambrose ignored all their siblings, and Edward named all of them equally, in a very formal fashion, it seems unreasonable to assume from this, as Winchester does, that only Edward was concerned about Sabine's interests by this time⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 50, pp.322-3

⁵⁸ B.L. Lansdowne Mss. vol. 26 no. 36

⁵⁹ P.C.C. 41 Carew. Edward Saunders left conventional bequests to servants, her jewels apparel and six horses to his wife, and a £20 annuity to Blaise, as well as the mementos to his sisters discussed here.

⁶⁰ Winchester, thesis vol.1, p. 532

⁶¹ Blaise's will: P.C.C. 34 Darcy; Ambrose's will: P.C.C. 41 Windsor

In terms of her religion Sabine shared Laurence's rather than Edward's position, although her religious practice was largely private as would become a woman, and she did not take it to the extremes which led to her brother's martyrdom. A deeply felt if usually conventionally expressed religious belief is frequently shown in the letters. It was normal for Sabine to pray to God for John's health, and to thank God for her own and the children's well being. There are other more personal expressions of religious conviction, as for example John's reply to a letter of Sabine's in which she urged him to watch his health for the sake of her and the children. He reminded her that he was in God's hands, and it was up to God 'to dispose me according to His holy will, and He it is that knowithe what is best for us'. If God chose to dispose of John in a way that she did not like, 'you must be content to receyve it thanckfully at the lordes haundes'.⁶² John expressed a similar trust in God when he told Cecil, at a critical moment in his life, that he believed the Lord would provide for what was needful for himself, his wife and children.⁶³ Sabine does not reveal her own views so intimately, but showed her faith by the traditional piety of writing the name of Jesus at the head of her letters, and even on new pages in her account book. It may be assumed that she attended church, but she rarely mentions this, except for a reference to a sermon preached at Polbroke by her brother Laurence.⁶⁴ The 'puritan' names given to her children and perhaps the warmth of her relationship with Laurence, reinforce the fact that Sabine like John supported the 'godly' or reformed view of religion. However there seems to be no evidence that the Johnsons were troubled by the authorities on religious grounds over the complex period of religious changes between 1542, when the letters began, and the establishment of the Elizabethan settlement in 1559, suggesting that they did not take their religious practice to the point where it provoked unwelcome attention.

As well as being responsible for her own children and their upbringing both religious and secular, Sabine had to oversee the behaviour of other young people. Her household contained servants and apprentices, and sometimes other family members. Inevitably these are most likely to enter the correspondence when there was a problem. One such problem occurred with an apprentice named William Pratt,

⁶² Winchester thesis vol.2, p. 493 [S. P.1/210/181];

⁶³ Cecil Mss vol.1 no. 26 [microfilm in British Library]

⁶⁴ S. P.1/201/94

and Sabine's response is illustrative of her character. Young Pratt (evidently much indulged by his mother) complained to his parents about the dreadful quality and inadequate quantity of the food in Sabine's house. Her bread, it seemed, was not fit for dogs, and her drink (presumably the small beer brewed at home) was undrinkable. The men of the household were forced to go into the town to get a decent dinner. Pratt, clearly a trouble-maker, stirred up the other men servants to support his views. The agitation in the household was reported back to John Johnson, who wrote to Sabine asking for an explanation. She must have been annoyed that he did not automatically take her part. He wrote 'if ye knowe they complayn with cause, I prairie you see it amended' but he urged her to examine the servants separately, naming two trustworthy ones, Jasper and Fewren, who should be able to help her ascertain the truth⁶⁵

Faced with a probably furious Sabine, young Mr Pratt changed his tune and denied complaining about the quality of the food, claiming he said only that he was not given enough to eat. Are three meals in winter and four in summer not enough for him? demanded Sabine. She suggested to her husband that if Pratt was not satisfied with this, he should go back to his mother 'that she might feed hem aiver our'.⁶⁶ Despite Pratt's denial that he had complained that no gentleman's house was so evil ordered as theirs, Sabine determined to show Pratt's mother, Mrs Fisher, that she was a good housewife and sent a batch of bread up to London. She sent it via Otwell, who decided that it was more prudent not to send the bread on to Mrs Fisher. Otwell assured Sabine that Mrs Fisher had been 'reasonably answered in all things by your husband' and that it was better to let the matter drop since the indentures of William's apprenticeship had now been signed.⁶⁷

The young person who perhaps caused the greatest problem in the household was Sabine's niece, daughter of her sister Christian and her husband Christopher Breten. Christian died young, and as has been noted above, her widower remarried Anne Saxby, a cousin of Sabine's. Breten continued close to the Johnsons and his daughter (whose first name is never given) was taken into the household at Glapthorn as Sabine had gone to Anthony Cave's household. A comparison with the old

⁶⁵ S. P.1/200/126 [Winchester thesis vol. 2, p.250]

⁶⁶ S. P.1/200/172 [Winchester thesis vol. 2, p.255]

⁶⁷ S. P.46/5/130

Duchess of Norfolk's household might however be more appropriate, for like the Duchess, Sabine does not seem to have controlled the young people under her roof as closely as she should have done. In Sabine's defence it may be said that John had been ill with the ague and she had been to Calais to nurse him, but nonetheless there was a serious neglect of duty. The Breten girl had become pregnant by Rede, one of the itinerant wool winders working at Glapthorn. Her secret had been discovered, presumably by another of the household, and while Sabine was still in Calais the rumours had begun. At first Christopher Breten was reluctant to believe it, but John convinced him that the 'brewte' was true. The girl was sent away from Glapthorn, her father agreeing to pay the expenses. Her fate in the long term was likely to be grim; Breten said she might have the broad world to walk in, but 'let her self provide for her' Many brides might have babies conceived before marriage,⁶⁸ but for a middle-class girl to be left pregnant and unmarried was clearly a devastating dishonour for her family.⁶⁹ It is interesting that the girl was condemned, as were those who spread the rumours, but Sabine escaped without criticism for her lack of supervision. Christopher Breten remained on good terms with John and Sabine, since his son Richard was staying with them in November 1551.

Problems with the young people in the household will have taken up some of Sabine's attention, but far more time will have been spent on the mundane activities of any Tudor housewife. In a recent book Anne Laurence writes:

Women's work then (and to a large extent now) was the jobs which get done all the time and are not therefore worthy of comment, like housework, or the things which need to be done in an emergency or seasonally.⁷⁰

Most of Sabine's work will have been of this kind: routine, boring but essential. She would have the overall responsibility for the household, even if she did not have to perform all the domestic chores herself. There were a few female servants at

⁶⁸ Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987) suggests that 'In early modern England generally, at least a fifth of all brides were with child by the time they got married in church'. (Ingram, p. 219) Compare J.L. Vives: 'As for a woman she hathe no charge to se to but her honestye and chastity . . .' *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (trans R.Hyrde, London 1541) sig. A iii r.

⁶⁹ The Breten girl's case was probably made even worse because of the class difference involved.

⁷⁰ Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1760: a social history* (London 1994) p. 109

Glaphorn, some of whom will have worked in the house. In great households upper servants were normally male, but the Johnsons' while prosperous was hardly a great household. Joan Coke may be presumed to be in fact 'Joan the Cook' (with an echo perhaps of Shakespeare's 'greasy Joan'⁷¹). There were also Marie and Dorete, who were both bought shoes in October 1550, and two Besses, Horseleye and Bainton. 'Preston's wife' was also sometimes employed.⁷² In 1542 when the Johnsons were setting up home at Polebrook, a neighbour, William Howham, wrote to John asking him to take his daughter into service. Howham described his daughter as having had three or four years experience and being 'broken with all werkes [for] a woman to do', and assured John that she had no vices. We do not unfortunately know if the girl was employed or not, but the letter provides an interesting example of a speculative enquiry for employment.⁷³

There were of course male servants in the household, but some of these will have been mainly concerned with farm work. The most important of the male servants was Richard Preston, who acted as steward. He was literate, and wrote reports to his master of his activities. Preston travelled as far as King's Lynn on Johnson business, and often carried money and paid bills. He was trusted not only with money, but also with the children, writing on one occasion to John and reporting that both his young mistresses were merry, when he had been left in charge while Sabine was staying with her husband.⁷⁴ Preston's infant daughter was named Sabine, suggesting that the elder Sabine stood as godmother.⁷⁵

The servants will have done the rough work, but Sabine herself carried out some domestic chores. It has already been noted that she made bread to convince William Pratt's mother that her bread was worth eating. She also made cheese, frequently sending it to John. Sabine was aware that her cheeses were not always as good as they should be, saying on one occasion 'I wold thay wair bater', but even so she considered her own cheeses better than those she could buy. Staying in London

⁷¹ 'greasy Joan doth keel the pot': William Shakespeare, *Love's Labours Lost*, Act V Scene II

⁷² Winchester thesis vol. 1 App. VIII pp. 1-3 [S. P.46/6/71-73];

⁷³ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 5 [S. P.1/243/277]

⁷⁴ Winchester vol.3, p. 596 [S. P.1/216/101]

⁷⁵ S. P46/7/4 We learn of the infant Sabine only because her father reported her death of the sweat in July 1551.

on one occasion she sent John 'ij cowpell of cheses' saying that if she had been at home 'you shold have had moye and better'.⁷⁶ John obviously welcomed gifts of food, also receiving butter, brawn, and the popular venison pasties. The butter at least she probably made herself, since her account book records small payments received for butter.⁷⁷ She may have cured her own bacon (or overseen the curing) since on one occasion John wrote to his friend Henry Southwick that 'my wyff sendith . . . a flich of bacon' to Southwick and his aunt Mrs Baynam.⁷⁸ Sabine certainly kept chickens since she sent John half a dozen in October 1545, together with a dozen pigeons. Around Christmas that year she sent him more unusual fare, perhaps from the farm, when she told him that he would receive 'a douson and a halfe of as good blackbyrds as aver you had'. Not, alas, four and twenty blackbirds, but John would still have had a very good pie.⁷⁹

Making cheese and butter would be considered part of the normal housewife's routine. Tusser made this clear in his strictures on the bad housewife who did not oversee her servants properly.

Ill huswife unskilful, to make her own cheese
Through trusting of others, hath this for her fees;
Her milk-pan and cream-pot, so slabber'd and sost,
That butter is wanting and cheese is half lost.⁸⁰

Tusser's housewife, among her long list of tasks, was given responsibility for the garden, and in this area also Sabine reflected the conventional model. There are several references to seeds being sent for what is clearly defined as Sabine's garden. In March 1544 at the time of the move to Glapthorn, Otwell referred to 'my systers newe gardens'. Unfortunately the seeds are never identified, so we do not know whether Sabine was growing culinary or medicinal herbs, vegetables or simply

⁷⁶ S. P. 1/211/33; Winchester thesis vol.2, p. 504 [S.P.46/5/70]

⁷⁷ S. P.46/5 pt.3/3

⁷⁸ S. P.46/5/121 This allowed John to make a little joke that he would have sent eggs as well but for fear of the eggs turning into 'caudles' on the way.

⁷⁹ S. P.1/211/192; Reay Tannahill *Food In History*, p.187 (London, 1988) describes a dish which bears resemblance to the nursery rhyme blackbird pie, since live birds were inserted into a precooked crust just before sending it the table, to be released when the pie was cut. Her reference is an Italian work of 1516 (Epulario, *The Italian Banquet*) but it was not translated until 1598. The dish made for John is likely to have been less spectacular.

⁸⁰ Thomas Tusser, *Five hundred points of good husbandry . . . together with A book of huswifery* (ed. William Mavor, London 1812) p. 141

flowers. The only seed that is identified is the practical hempseed, producing a fibre which could be spun (and considered by Tusser a standard part of the housewife's garden). Sabine herself does not discuss her garden, and though Winchester suggests 'Sabine enjoyed gardening' it may be that she merely regarded it as another necessary occupation.⁸¹

She also sewed, (yet another necessary occupation) but it is possible that she took pleasure in this. John asked his assistant Robert Andrew to buy thread for her in Antwerp, passing on careful instructions which Sabine had presumably given to him, and insisting that it must be the best thread. He even suggested where the thread should be bought, and advised that if possible Andrews should get 'some fayre mayde' to help him. If the thread was not right, he warned 'I shal be shent of my wyfe'.⁸²

Her domestic activities were conventional, but unlike many Tudor housewives, Sabine was in a position where she had to take significant decisions. While John was away in Calais or in London, she was responsible for the farm and for certain aspects of the business. She bought and sold livestock, oversaw the woolwinders and tried to get trade for John. Between 1546 and 1548 Sabine kept her own account book.⁸³ In this Sabine painstakingly if somewhat confusingly recorded her expenditure and receipts, thus making clear the degree of responsibility she held. This is confirmed by many references in her letters to John. A few examples from the account book will give an indication of Sabine's agricultural duties.

anno 1546 The ffyrst of maye
Item for iij sheep of the wch ij wayere lambe hogges and a share shep ix^s iiij^d
Item the same day for iij shep what wayre lambe hogges viij^s ⁸⁴
The 16 in maye
The same daye for ij graat oxsen iiij hackafordes v mylche kye and iiij drye
kye Som xv bestes and payed for the same Som 10 17 8
Cattell sold anno 1546
The 8 in maye for ij oxsen sold by the shaperde 2 6 8
The 17 in maye for a calfe sold 0 2 8
The 14 in june

⁸¹ S. P.1/183/162; S. P.46/7/164; S. P.46/5/131; Barbara Winchester, *Tudor Family Portrait* (London 1955) p. 140

⁸² S. P. 46/5/100 [Winchester vol. 3, p. 680]

⁸³ S.P. 46/5 pt.3 Sabine used a small notebook bound between pages from an old manuscript copy of the Book of Ezekiel.

⁸⁴ S. P.46/5 pt.3 /4

for a calves sken and a lambas sken 008⁸⁵

John Johnson kept sheep himself as well as buying and selling wool. After shearing the wool had to be wound. This was a somewhat unpleasant job (the tail ends of fleeces were particularly repulsive) but required skill since a good winder could wind the wool in such a way as to conceal the less desirable hairy parts of the fleece. Wool winders were often itinerant, moving round the country in the summer months.⁸⁶ They were not always easily obtained; in October 1544 Otwell complained that he could find no wool winders prepared to go down into the country for less than 8d a day plus horse meat and man's meat.⁸⁷ The following autumn John gave Sabine very precise instructions regarding the winding and packing of his wool.⁸⁸ Sabine was also given instructions about paying the wool winders, but found this a problem. The winders thought young Mrs Johnson was an easy target, and insisted that John had promised them a 'reward' as well as their agreed pay. The winders' instinct was probably right, since Sabine agreed to give them an extra twelve shillings, not the ten shillings that John had promised.⁸⁹

An important part of John's business as a Stapler was the buying of wool for resale. Much of this business was in the hands of servants such as Preston and agents such as Harrison, but Sabine herself negotiated for wool sales at times, particularly with kinsfolk and friends. In May 1546 when she was advanced in pregnancy Sabine told John of her efforts to buy wool from her 'father' (her stepfather Robert Chauntrell), and others.⁹⁰ Dealing with the family did not necessarily make for an easy bargain. Robert Chauntrell for example would not make a deal with his stepdaughter and her husband unless the price was right. In the autumn of 1545 Chauntrell refused to sell John his wool, sending Sabine a message that John's price was not good

⁸⁵ S. P. 46 5 pt.3 /6 Hogs were sheep before the first shearing. Hackafords were heifers

⁸⁶ Peter J. Bowden *The Wool Trade in Tudor and Stuart England* (London 1962) p. 23

⁸⁷ S. P. 1/193/40

⁸⁸ Winchester vol.2, p. 394 [S. P. 1/212/181] She was to avoid having the fleeces broken, and to see that the wool was packed in three types, the inferior end wool, the 'fayrest of the clyft wull' and the darkest 'clyft wull'. He also gave instructions about labelling the packs with one, two or three pitch brands, reinforced with marks and numbers in red stone.

⁸⁹ Winchester thesis vol.2, p. 480 [S. P. 1/210/135]

⁹⁰ S. P. 46/5/160

enough, and that if he had really wanted the wool he would have come for it sooner.⁹¹ Sabine evidently visited these clients on horseback, since there are references to horseshoes and a new saddle for Sabine's mare.⁹² A critical reference she made to Mrs Hosse coming on foot to see her perhaps implies that she herself would not visit in such a way.⁹³

To pay Harrison the wool buyer and others with whom she dealt, Sabine needed cash. The supply of money was always a problem, especially in a time of inflation. It was possible sometimes to get long terms of payment; in June 1545 John told Sabine that he hoped Harrison could avoid paying for the last wool crop until Michaelmas.⁹⁴ More than once Sabine complained of her difficulty in paying bills. In November 1545 she had 'hard sheft' to pay their rent for the lands they held from Lord Cromwell, and sent Richard Preston to his lordship to make the excuse that John was away from home and would bring the rent himself when he returned.⁹⁵

Payment could not always be avoided, and to pay her bills Sabine sometimes had to apply to Otwell in London for the money. This was the cause of a major dispute in autumn 1545 Sabine, faced by Harrison needing to pay for the wool he had bought, and already having had to deal with woolwinders discontented with their pay, sent to her brother-in-law asking for an extra forty pounds. She had received twenty five pounds shortly before, but since this was not enough for her needs, she sent Richard Preston to Otwell to demand the extra 'owte of hannd'. Unfortunately Sabine caught Otwell at a bad moment when the business was short of money and Otwell was reluctant to borrow. Otwell considered that Sabine was being too demanding, and too easily led by Harrison.⁹⁶ Though he sent her the money he commented sharply

It is nether your howsbounde nor I that kepe of any suche store of monney laying by us, that harrysone may have of us what he will appoint, with sending of yor man for the same'

⁹¹ S. P.1/209/217

⁹² See e.g. S. P.46/6/47; S. P.46/5/12

⁹³ S. P. 46/6/152 See also below, 31

⁹⁴ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 320 [S. P.1/212/187]

⁹⁵ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 504 [S. P.1/211/32]

⁹⁶ S. P.1/201/1

Otwell reminded Sabine that money had already been sent for Harrison, including some that John had not provided for at his leaving for Calais. He allowed his considerable irritation to show in the further comment:

By my trought I will retorne yor man empty the next tyme that he cometh in suche hast as he doeth nowe, withowte some knowledge aforehand, & especially when I am sure that my brother make no reconing of suche sending. To add to Otwell's annoyance, Sabine had asked him to send her red wine, but he was unsure how to send it down to the country, and told her so rather than sending any wine.⁹⁷

Sabine, equally annoyed when Otwell's reply arrived, complained to her husband that Otwell was 'veray angery' and had 'fumed well' with her. She defended herself saying that Harrison needed the money, and she had given him no more 'than he most nedes'. The lack of wine rankled with Sabine and she complained that she had had a 'great fond myend for it' for three weeks but that Otwell refused to send it for fear of how 'it woold be taken of all partes'. She was not prepared to write to Otwell for the wine again, but clearly hoped John himself would send some. At the end of this letter Sabine added rather pathetically that she was never so weary with writing⁹⁸

The unpleasantness rumbled on for a couple of weeks. Otwell when forwarding a letter of Sabine's to John commented that he thought it contained 'moche mater of displeasur agenst me', and added that he had also received an impertinent letter from Harrison. He would not, he said, answer either of them.⁹⁹ John tried to soothe all the parties, assuring Sabine that she should soon receive the red wine she wanted, though his apparently playful reluctance to call her 'good wife' lest he be called a liar, suggests that he was not entirely in sympathy with his wife over the matter.¹⁰⁰ The brothers perhaps discussed the matter since Otwell wrote Sabine a rather half-hearted apology but in a letter to John he showed that both regarded Sabine's annoyance as 'lyke a woman's tale' and not to be taken too seriously. He did however promise that his sister-in-law should have her red wine.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ S. P.46/5/138

⁹⁸ S. P.1/210/58

⁹⁹ S. P.1/210/70

¹⁰⁰ S. P.46/5/141

¹⁰¹ S. P.1/210/164; Winchester thesis vol. 2, p.88 [S. P.1/210/176]

One reason for the Johnsons' problems over money was the inflation of the time, exacerbated in the later period of the letters by the debasements of the coinage of 1548 and 1551. In 1551 especially Sabine faced problems in paying bills. Money had to be gathered up from creditors as far away as Lynn by Preston and supplemented by Otwell before she could do so, but most debts were 'unpayed for lakke of mony'. At the same time she was buying sheep for her husband, though she failed to buy Lady Brudenell's wool. Sabine reported that the Brudenell wool was sold for 24s a tod, to be paid 'as the mony goyth nowe' showing the problems that the debasement was causing.¹⁰²

This was at the end of May 1551, when there was particular concern and uncertainty about the coinage. On 30th April Northumberland's government proclaimed its intention to reduce the value of the coinage in an attempt to restore the proper relationship between the face value of the coinage and the value of its silver content. The testoon, formerly valued at twelve pence, would be reduced to ninepence, while the groat would fall from fourpence to threepence. In both cases this was still more than the silver in the coins was worth. However the government made the mistake of announcing the fall in the value of the coins some four months before it was due to be implemented, leading to a period of rumour and speculation, despite belated attempts to amend the situation and to make rumour-mongering a punishable offence.¹⁰³ It is not surprising that Lady Brudenell wanted to be sure that her wool sale would bring in a guaranteed payment.

When Preston brought the money from Lynn so Sabine could pay John's debts, some of his creditors would have been happy to have given him credit until Michaelmas (perhaps hoping money would be worth more by then).¹⁰⁴ One creditor who was more pressing was Bartholomew Hosse, who like John used his wife to assist him in his business. Mrs Hosse was not a friend of Sabine's, apparently. Sabine complained that Mrs Hosse had come on foot, and 'as lyke a slot as aver she was'. Sabine did though check with the sluttish Mrs Hosse how much John owed her

¹⁰² S. P.46/6/152

¹⁰³ C.E. Challis, *The Tudor Coinage* (Manchester 1978) pp. 105-6

¹⁰⁴ S. P.46/6/154

husband, and how many fells he had available.¹⁰⁵ Neither woman thought there was anything amiss about a wife assisting a husband in his business.

Despite their apparent prosperity, as has been demonstrated above even in good times the Johnsons had financial difficulties. Any extra source of income was clearly welcome, and one such source which John tried to exploit was tithes. Despite the Johnsons' religious devotion (perhaps partly because of it) they did not always have an easy relationship with the local clergy. John and Sabine's first house after their marriage was the parsonage at Polebroke, leased to them by Sabine's cousin Parson Thomas Saxby. The lease included not just the house and lands but also the tithes, both great and small, which made a useful contribution to the Johnson's income. This was a common practice at the time, and from the parson's point of view saved him the 'inconvenience, expense and odium' of collecting his own tithes.¹⁰⁶ When the Johnsons moved to Glapthorn John saw his opportunity to continue this source of income. He made an agreement with the incumbent of Cotterstock, Edward Artwicke, to lease all the tithes and profits of the living for a sum of twenty pounds a year for a period of six years. Unfortunately for John, Artwicke (an old man), soon afterwards resigned the living in favour of Edmund Oliver. Oliver resented the deal, which he considered had been concluded behind his back, and set about trying to regain the tithes. He was aided in this by one Nicholas Walker, who had previously farmed the tithes and offered more money for them.¹⁰⁷ Parson Oliver took the case to court, and eventually the Lord Chancellor found in his favour.¹⁰⁸ While the issue was proceeding, however, it was Sabine who had to deal with much of the aggravation, and there are many references to the 'parsonage matter' in the correspondence of 1545. There were practical aspects to the problem. Sabine on one occasion was expecting the arrival of the tithe milk, and wanted to know the answer to the case before the milk was due, lest she went to the trouble of making cheese for someone else's benefit.¹⁰⁹ She also acted as an intermediary in the matter

¹⁰⁵ S. P.46/6/152

¹⁰⁶ Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church from Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford, 1956), p.114; A.G.Dickens, *The English Reformation* (2nd edition, London 1989), p.70

¹⁰⁷ Walker was called 'walk-a-knave' in the correspondence.

¹⁰⁸ C.1/1148/23-25

¹⁰⁹ Winchester vol. 2, p. 255 [S. P.1/200/172]

herself, calling on Mr Brudenell and asking him to help expedite a solution. She feared that the longer the case dragged on, the less profit John would receive, even should the decision be in their favour. She was right to be worried, for a few days later she wrote that the parson had sold the tithe milk (presumably it had never reached Sabine), had got rid of several calves, and would sell the hay if he could find a buyer.¹¹⁰ It is clear from this that the sympathies of the village were with the parson rather than the incoming Johnsons, and the villagers had taken their tithe contributions direct to the parson rather than bringing them to Sabine at the manor.

The parson himself seems to have been harassing Sabine. Otwell told John that he had heard from Sabine (who was with the Caves at Tickeford) that the parson had been 'veray hasty with her, to delyver him the corne and other tyethes that she haeth reced'.¹¹¹ Despite standing up to parson Oliver telling him that she knew of no end to the case yet, Sabine was feeling the strain, and urged John to come home, making 'all the sped that you can'. She urged him 'considar, good husbond, how I am trubelled with a Sir Prest, and have great nede of helpe'.¹¹² The parson continued to visit Sabine demanding the tithe corn, and she continued to deny him, until Mr Brudenell warned that the Lord Chancellor had found in the parson's favour, so that she should hand over the tithes to him, or risk being put in the Fleet by the parson's malice 'I had as leve the parson wayer ther as other you or I' Sabine told her husband crossly.¹¹³ Following the Lord Chancellor's judgement, Parson Oliver and Nicholas Walker arranged a date when they would come to Sabine to collect the tithes of 'woll and lambe, hay and other thynges'. Sabine feared how they would treat her; in her husband's absence they might be 'exxtreme with me'. She decided therefore that in John's absence she would go either to Polebroke or to the Brudenells' for the day, 'for ij enneymes ayenst oon woman is to mytche'. Presumably she would leave the business to be conducted by Richard Preston or some other of the servants.¹¹⁴ The matter was still not finished. Six months later in May 1546 Sabine recorded that she had paid their rent, the subsidy, and £3 to 'the good parson of this towne' for the

¹¹⁰ Winchester thesis vol.2, p. 266 [S. P.1/201/26] ; Winchester thesis vol.2, p. 289 [S. P.1/201/94]

¹¹¹ S. P.1/211/18

¹¹² Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 504 [S. P.1/211/32]

¹¹³ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 515 [S. P.1/211/94]

¹¹⁴ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 543 [S. P.1/211/192]

tithes that they had received.¹¹⁵ In the light of all the trouble and expense the Johnsons had endured over the tithes of Glapthorn, it is perhaps surprising that John was later to repeat the experiment of leasing church property, including tithes, in the 1560s, again with unhappy results.

It could be said that the Johnsons brought the trouble caused by tithe-farming upon themselves. Other problems, such as disease, could not be avoided. There are many references to the presence or absence of plague in a particular place, and the effect this would have on people's activities. As an example, in one week in November 1546 Sabine expressed fear of plague in Calais, and urged John 'not to go amongst them' if this was so, while seven days later John in turn responded to her fears expressed in an earlier letter that a case of plague had occurred not far from Glapthorn. He assured her that provided the plague came no nearer than Cotterstock she need not worry, but if it came to the village of Glapthorn itself, she should take her children and household to Polebroke, leaving only a skelton staff at home. He added that he thought she would be in no danger provided she kept out of the town¹¹⁶ Plague was a part of life, to be avoided, but not a cause of neurotic reaction to the Johnsons¹¹⁷

There were more everyday illnesses as well. Twice Sabine suffered a severe cold so that she lost her voice for several days, leading her to make an ironic comment that 'I have had a lacke this iij dayes that you say a woman doythe naver lacke'.¹¹⁸ As might be expected the children also had their illnesses. Rachel was ill in the late summer of 1545. John, writing to Sabine expressed his pleasure that the child was recovering, but added a comment which expresses an attitude that seems to give

¹¹⁵ S. P.46/5/159

¹¹⁶ S. P. 1/209/217; S. P.46/5/140

¹¹⁷ A year before the letters quoted above, Otwell's 'boy' (perhaps his apprentice) died in his house. Otwell was unsure whether young Henry had died of the plague or not. He thought the boys's mother should be told it was the plague, or else she would suspect 'that he wer cast away for lakking of loking unto'. Rather sadly Otwell insisted this was not the case, since the boy had died in his arms. S. P.1/210/176 [Winchester thesis vol. 2, p. 88]

¹¹⁸ S. P.46.7/87; see also Winchester thesis vol. 2, p.303 [S. P.1/201/148] Sabine may be making a conscious comment here on the value placed on a woman's silence. Shrewish speech was much criticised and even seen as suggestive of adultery. 'Women's talk always threatens disorder; women's silence thus comes to be prized to an absurd degree'. Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven & London 1995) pp.12-14

support to the 'distant' view of early modern parenting. He urged Sabine 'comme not moche at her yourself, leest you get the disease yourself'. Rachel was less than a year old at this time, and presumably was with a wet nurse. Sabine made no further reference to the child's illness, which also suggests that she was content to let the nurse take responsibility.¹¹⁹ Another reference to children's illness seems surprisingly casual to a modern reader. Richard Sandell, Maria Johnson's servant reported to John that 'Israel and Abigaile hathe had the smallpoxe, but they are metely well againe now'. Smallpox was not the scourge it became later, but serious facial scarring was a real risk, Queen Elizabeth herself was scarred by the disease.¹²⁰

The illness which was to have the most devastating effect on the Johnsons, however, was not the plague or smallpox, but the terrifying and mysterious disease called 'the sweat'. The sweat recurred on several occasions in the sixteenth century, before disappearing apparently as mysteriously as it arrived. The last outbreak in 1551 was also the most severe. On the 8th July Otwell Johnson wrote a routine business letter to his brother from London, though unusually prefacing it with the pious exhortation 'The lord lyveth'. In his last paragraph he described how the sweat was spreading 'dyers other plases ar sore infected/ & even this Cite within this x days wt Swete & sodain death'. Sadly he recorded how the 'yongest and lykelyst men & women' were the most liable to succumb to the disease. One of those who had died, he told John, was the landowner of Glaphorn, Lord Cromwell himself. Otwell's own parish was not exempt; twenty houses had been affected, though so far only three people had died.¹²¹ He prayed for divine protection. Alas, his prayer was not answered. Within two days of writing this letter, Otwell Johnson himself had died of the sweat. He had come in from 'the street' depressed with hearing of the deaths of friends, went to bed early at seven, and was suddenly seized with extreme pain. For four or five hours he remained conscious, before sinking into coma and dying at three in the morning. His brother-in-law Bartholomew Warner at first attended him, but

¹¹⁹ Winchester thesis vol. 2, p.394 [S. P.1/212/181]

¹²⁰ Winchester thesis vol. 4, p. 1346 [S. P. 46/7/38] Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1700*, p. 96; J.E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (Harmondsworth, 1960) p.125

¹²¹ S. P.46/6/181. Rapid death such as Otwell's was characteristic of the sweat. An indication of the virulence of the disease is that in three weeks around 800 people died in London alone. Alan Dyer, unpublished paper given at the Bangor Tudor Workshop, April 1993.

was called away to his own wife who had also been taken ill. Mrs Warner however survived, as did Ambrose Saunders, another victim.

The sweat was not confined to London. Sabine happened to be in Calais with John, and Richard Preston wrote sadly to them that 'my wyf is sayd and seke for loys of sabyne my dowter'. God had taken very many, and 'we ar afrayd of this strang dessys'. The household had lost its discipline, and with both master and mistress away at such a time 'our fokis wyll noyt be rewlyd'. Preston, not knowing (on the 18th July) of Otwell's death, wondered why he had not heard from either John or Otwell for ten days. He did not know that the sweat had also struck in Calais, and that both John and Sabine had fallen victim, though neither seriously. John admitted that the disease combined with the news of Otwell's death had 'caused me to forget busynes and in a manner all the world'. Writing to his assistant Robert Andrews he recommended a treatment for the sweat. The patient should be wrapped up and protected from draughts, but not be over hot. He should be given little to drink, but if necessary beer or ale sodden with a crust of bread, mace and sugar. The most vital thing, John said, was to keep the patient awake for twenty four hours, for 'he that slepith dieth'. Maintaining wakefulness was clearly a problem, and John recommended pulling a man's beard, pulling hard if necessary. He himself had lost much of his beard this way. The logic of this treatment was that those who had the sweat only mildly could stay awake, while those most severely affected by it would lose consciousness, and appear to slip from sleep into death. It would have seemed therefore that forcing the patient to stay awake would save his life.¹²²

Otwell's death and John's own illness started the chain of events that were to lead to the downfall of the Johnsons. Otwell was replaced in the company by his younger brother Richard and Sabine's brother Ambrose, neither of whom had the skill or experience that was needed. There were various unwise or simply unfortunate investments, such as one in a large quantity of Spanish wine. The deal came late in the season, making it difficult to obtain ships, and when ships were finally found, they were attacked by French warships before they even reached Spain, leaving the

¹²² S. P.46/6/182; S. P.46/7/4; S. P.46/6/112; I am grateful to Alan Dyer for discussion about the sweat. According to Dr.Dyer the reference here to pulling beards to keep the patient awake is unique, though the advice to avoid sleep was standard - see for example Ambrose Saunders to John Johnson, Winchester thesis vol. 4, p. 1239 [S. P.46/7/2] where the same point is made.

Johnsons with a large quantity of wine in Spain, unsold but still to be paid for. Though some was eventually shipped, much of it had to be sold off in Spain at a loss. The final rather dubious deal involved selling a large amount of wool (48 sarplars¹²³) in return for a mysterious jewel supposedly worth £1000, and £1,700 in money. Richard did not however take pains to find the wool, leaving John to do this, and going off into France himself. Meanwhile the debts of the company had built up, far more than anyone had realised, and once it became apparent that the Johnsons were going to have difficulty in paying, the creditors began to gather.¹²⁴ In spring 1553 the Johnsons' business was declared bankrupt, and their papers were called in by the Privy Council¹²⁵

The Johnsons owed a horrifying amount of money, £8,000 in 1553. In an effort to recoup some of this, the creditors brought various cases in the High Court of Admiralty relating to cargoes in which John had, or was to be believed to have, an interest. While the cases were in progress, John remained at liberty. He and his partners were given twelve months protection from imprisonment for debt in April 1554.¹²⁶ At the end of this period, and after judgement had been given against him in the Admiralty cases, John was pursued by the first of his creditors (the widow of a man who had lent him £300) and as a result was imprisoned in the Fleet.¹²⁷ In 1557 the Johnsons' case was finally settled, with the formation of a committee to deal with the richest creditors who had been preventing a fair distribution of the Johnson assets, and the intention of bringing an end to the case. As a result, John and his partners were released from prison.¹²⁸

We know virtually nothing of Sabine's action during this period. Since John was a Draper, it is possible that Sabine might have applied to the Drapers' Company

¹²³ A sarplar was either three 'sacks' or three 'pockets' of wool, making it either 1108 lbs or 1092 lbs. 48 sarplars would be well over twenty tons of wool. Peter J. Bowden, *The Wool Trade in Tudor and Stuart England* (London 1962)

¹²⁴ There are detailed accounts of the business transactions leading up the bankruptcy, and the bankruptcy itself, in Winchester thesis, vol.1 pp. 407ff, and in B. Winchester, *Tudor Family Portrait* pp.274-306

¹²⁵ S.P. 11/11/20-21; *Acts of the Privy Council*, ed. J. R. Dasent (London 1892) vol. 4, p. 255

¹²⁶ *Cal. Pat. Rolls I Mary*, 229

¹²⁷ Winchester thesis, vol. 1, pp. 471-2

¹²⁸ Winchester thesis vol.1, p. 474

for help, but there is no evidence of this.¹²⁹ Her influence may well have been involved in pursuing a distant family connection she had with William Cecil.¹³⁰ As well as being a kinsman Cecil was one of John's creditors (for wool from Cecil's father which had never been paid for). In May 1553 John wrote to Cecil suggesting a way of assuring the money he owed, by attaching a cargo of Seville oil due to arrive shortly on the *Trinity*. He added that he trusted steadfastly in the 'living lord' to provide 'all thinges nedeful for me, my wife and childerne'.¹³¹ A few days earlier John had written to Cecil asking him to be his 'good master and frend in all my sewtes', and it seems reasonable to suggest that Sabine had urged John to try to get this important cousin on his side.¹³²

John continued to regard Cecil as a patron. Cecil was probably responsible for finding John a job with Lord Paget, as a secretary and book keeper. In the 1570s John was also to send many ambitious proposals to Cecil, as well as to Walsingham, another of Sabine's kinsmen. Meanwhile the Johnsons continued to be based at Glapthorn, through the good will of the Brudenells, at least until 1557. In 1555 John's name was included on a rental for the sum of £4, half the previous amount, which led Winchester to the conclusion that John no longer rented the enclosed pastures he had previously held. John Johnson continued to be listed as a tenant at Glapthorn until 1557, and it may be assumed that Sabine continued to live mainly there as before.¹³³

In the autumn of 1561, another cousin Walter Haddon, Master of Requests, helped John obtain the the parsonage of West Wickham in Kent. This was done by a rather devious agreement with the Bishop of Rochester, by which John obtained the advowson from the patron of the living, and presented one William Fane, the bishop's chaplain, to the living. Fane in his turn agreed to let John have the parsonage house for a rent of £8, plus the right to the use of a room. Unfortunately for John, Fane

¹²⁹ I am grateful to Penelope Fussell, Archivist of the Drapers' Company, for searching the relevant Drapers' records on my behalf.

¹³⁰ Cecil's sister Margaret was married to Roger Cave. Winchester thesis, vol. 1, p. 474

¹³¹ Cecil Mss vol.1 no. 126 [microfilm copy in British Library; H.M.C. *Mss. of Marquis of Salisbury* (London 1883) part 1 no 455, p.122]

¹³² Cecil Mss. vol. 1 no. 125 [H.M.C *Salisbury*, part I no. 453, p. 122]

¹³³ Brudenell Mss O. xx. 13, Brudenell Mss B. xiii. 16, cited by Winchester thesis vol.1. pp. 470-471

changed his mind, deciding he wanted to keep both living, tithes and parsonage house, and took John to court for 'forcyble enteringe into the said rectorie and for deteyninge of the same with force'. The assize court having found in John's favour, Fane pursued the case to the Queen's Bench which again turned him down, and finally obtained a writ from Chancery. By now, despite the legal muddle, the Johnsons had moved into the parsonage house.

Fane, perhaps knowing that John and Sabine were not at home, came to the parsonage with a bailiff, Henry Asshewell, and some of the local 'heavy mob', intending to force their way in. According to Fane's own version of the story the bailiff and the others assembled quietly while the bailiff read out his warrant. He then 'did openly demande and aske what persons were within the said house', in other words presumably shouted at the inhabitants to come out. Perhaps to his surprise an eighteen year old girl, possibly Charity, answered (perhaps from an open window) that there were only herself and her sisters present. The bailiff gave 'two or three punches' at the door, threatening to break the door down if it was not opened. She then opened the door and bailiff and parson marched in, quickly searching the house for armed persons and weapons, but 'founde . . . only one bill' . The girls were told to leave the house quietly, which they did, and in Fane's account of the event they were allowed to make repeated journeys back into the house to carry out their possessions. The children had spirit; Fane had impounded the cattle and sheep to stop them eating up the grass in the pasture, but the 'bygge daughter' broke into the pound and released the animals ¹³⁴

There are some apparent inconsistencies in the account. John referred to 'fyve chylidren the daughters of yor said orator wherof one was aboute the age of eightene yeares and the others were verie younge withowte any other companie'. John and Sabine had five children, but only three daughters. Even if two of the children had been Evangelist and the baby Edward, surely Fane would have known the difference, but he also refers only to girls. The date of the incident seems to have been about 1563, by which time Evangelist at least would long ago have been breeched. Possible explanations are that the three Johnson girls were present with two others, perhaps cousins; that there were younger sisters who are not otherwise named in the Johnson

¹³⁴ P.R.O. C.3/101/13 i., ii and iii

papers; or that Charity or Rachel were married by now with babies of their own, whom John might have included in the general term 'daughters'. The identity of the eldest girl is also not clear. Winchester assumes this was Charity, but by 1563 Charity would have been about 21, so it may in fact have been Rachel.

There is no indication of where John and Sabine were on this eventful day. There seem to be no further references to Sabine, apart from a passing reference in 1576, and her brother Edward's will of November in the same year, but that makes it clear that she was still alive until that year at least. The Johnsons lived at West Wickham parsonage until about 1570, not finally settling their differences with parson Fane until 1567.¹³⁵

After their departure from West Wickham the Johnsons moved to London, where at least in 1572 they lived in Westminster.¹³⁶ As has been indicated, John worked for a time for Paget. Later he was found a post as Clerk of the Staple, at £40 a year, with his son Edward as his assistant and under-clerk. He held this until at least December 1582, though resentful of his fall in fortune and apparently despised by those who might once have been his colleagues.

In the 1570s and early 1580s John Johnson occupied himself with devising schemes for the betterment of the national economy, particularly with regard to the wool trade, where as he reminded those to whom he wrote, he had much experience. Perhaps his most ambitious scheme was a proposal to recreate the great days of Antwerp, with a new market centre in England having all the trading advantages of Antwerp. He called his project, devised together with Christopher Goodwin, 'Ipswich out of England, or Antwerp in England'.¹³⁷ It was not entirely a new idea, and had already been considered by Sir Thomas Smith. John sent his plan, which would see four great markets a year at Ipswich (Goodwin's home town), and vastly increase England's trade, to Cecil for his consideration. Cecil duly considered the plan, asking various merchants for their views, but the merchants made clear their opposition, and Cecil took it no further, despite hopeful reminders from Johnson. There were other schemes over the next ten years, and one can imagine Cecil and Walsingham, both

¹³⁵ Close Rolls C. 54/746, 9 Eliz. Part 20, cited by Winchester thesis vol. 1, p. 489

¹³⁶ S.P.12/88/33

¹³⁷ *Cal. S. P. Dom.* 1547-1580 p.447 (vol. 88 no. 22)

recipients of Johnson's schemes, sighing as they received yet another letter from John reminding them of his great mercantile experience, and suggesting yet another way both to improve English trade and line their own pockets.¹³⁸ They did though give due consideration to the projects, and it must be assumed that John was treated with courtesy by his great kinsmen, since as late as June 1582 he was asking Walsingham for a livery coat, and saying 'it is my great comfort to be knowne that your honour accepteth me for one of your servantes'.¹³⁹

There is no way of telling what Sabine thought of the change of John's fortunes after the bankruptcy, nor how she reacted to his constant new projects, and his constantly bombarding her important kinsfolk with them. It is notable that he never entreated the great men in the name of kinship, though doubtless they were aware of this. John's projects cease after December 1582. He was growing old. He complained of his age and of health problems, and his handwriting, previously very legible, was getting a little shaky. It has to be presumed that John Johnson died in the middle 1580s, but there seems no evidence of his death. If he wrote a will, it has apparently not been preserved. Nor did Sabine leave a will, which might suggest that she died before her husband, since a married woman would not normally write a will

¹³⁸ John's projects, in addition to those dealing with mart towns, include the following

A brief declaration ... of abuse in the size of wood, and how to remedy the same *Cal. S. P. Dom. 1547-80* p. 398 (vol. 75 no. 7)

Incorporation of a new company of Merchants to enjoy the rights possessed by the Merchant Adventurers *op. cit.* p. 447 (vol. 88 no. 23)

Proposition for appointment of an officer to prevent the exportation of all commodities prohibited by law. *op. cit.* p. 448 (vol. 88 no. 48)

Proposition for appointment of an officer to inspect all goods exported by licence *op. cit.* p. 448 (vol. 88 no. 49)

Discourse to the Queen and Council for the repairing of the decayed state of the merchants of the Staple, and for the erection of certain new staples. *op. cit.* p. 552 (vol. 114 no. 58)

Suit to be made to the Queen for better answering of customs for tin, lead, leather, butter, cheese, and all other staple commodities for the realm. *Cal. S. P. Dom. 1580-1590* p. 60 (vol. 154 no. 29)

Discourse showing priviledge for the Merchants of the Staple to transport cloth into the low countries as well as Merchant Adventurers. *op. cit.* p. 60 (vol. 154 no. 32)

¹³⁹ S. P.12/154/22

whereas a widow was much more likely to do so.¹⁴⁰ There is no evidence of an appeal by Sabine as a widow to John's livery company, which again suggests that she may have predeceased him. She seems simply to disappear.

For the ten years of the correspondence which has been preserved, Sabine Johnson is cast into the spotlight, and is revealed as a woman with strengths and weaknesses, pleasures and problems, and at times a sense of humour. When the spotlight disappears, Sabine herself virtually disappears also. When her letters cease (and since John was presumably largely at home after 1553, apart from his period in the Fleet, the correspondence between husband and wife will have ceased) we have virtually no information about her. With John's return home to her in fact, Sabine is lost to us. But for those ten brief years, the Johnson letters give a vivid account of the life of a busy Tudor gentlewoman, who like so many of her contemporaries was wife, mother and housewife, but with the added dimension given by her literacy and her husband's absence.

¹⁴⁰ Claire Cross, "Northern women in the early modern period: the female testators of Hull and Leeds 1520-1650" in *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, Vol. 59, 1987, p. 85

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

The introduction to this thesis posed three questions. Did the idealised image of women in any way reflect women's lives? Were women restricted in their real lives by the constraints of the image? What were the factors that determined how upper class early Tudor Englishwomen lived their lives? Men and women will have read the conduct books and interpreted them in different ways. Men were likely to be reaffirmed in their prejudices or their preconceptions. Women were mostly no doubt reassured that the way in which they lived was the only acceptable way.

One vital area where the conduct books did reflect woman's lives, and also constrained them was the question of chastity. The conduct books confirmed that chastity was a woman's principal virtue, that obedience and silence were part of the Biblical vision of the way women must live. Anything else led to disaster. Women could see the need for chastity merely by looking around them. Unchastity was traditionally a woman's downfall. For a young middle class lawyer's daughter (like the Breten girl) or for a queen of England (like Katherine Howard) unchaste behaviour could lead, at best, to expulsion from the family home, at worst, to death. More usually, unchastity led to pregnancy and all its complications, often a hasty and perhaps ill-considered marriage. Little wonder that the commonest insults to women were those that impugned chastity.¹ To call a woman a whore was a serious matter and might be sufficient for her to initiate legal action. Women might at times escape the constraints of chastity, but for most women most of the time pure practicality as well as the moral and religious code meant that their lives had to be bounded by chastity.

Obedience too was often imposed on women. The parent had the right to determine his daughter's marriage. The very fact that a parent such as the Duchess of Suffolk expressed her unwillingness to force a child reluctantly into marriage reminds us that this was in fact done.² Both sons and daughters had to be obedient to their

¹ Gowing, Laura, 'Language, power and the law: women's slander litigation in early modern London' in Jenny Kermode and Garthine Walker eds. *Women Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London 1994)

² The fifth earl of Northumberland appears to have insisted on his son's marriage to Mary Talbot, and Sir Walter Mildmay similarly put pressure on his son Anthony to marry Grace Sharnington later in the century. See Linda Pollock, *With*

parents, but the young man forced unwillingly into marriage had perhaps a greater range of possible action. Wives as well as daughters were required to be obedient, and the husband's right to demand this was enshrined in tradition. The husband whose wife did not obey him was seen as a figure of mockery.

Silence was the third womanly virtue. This was emphasised by the conduct book writers and the balladeers, but in terms which suggested that silence was something that had to be imposed on a woman, not something that came naturally. The much repeated fable of the devil and the aspen leaves makes this clear, as indeed does the idea of the 'scold' who was seen typically as a woman. 'Silence' as a virtue encompassed other things such as staying at home, a point much emphasised by Vives

Silence and staying at home could be seen as a metaphor for the idea that woman's sphere was the private one. Men lived a public life, women a private life. This was the theory, and to a large extent the practice also, especially if the term 'private' is expanded to mean 'domestic' in a wider sense. Women were expected to live their lives primarily in the domestic sphere, and not to take part in public life. This does not mean that because they lived in the domestic sphere, women were regarded as inferior in that sphere. Women were undoubtedly seen as 'the weaker vessel' and even as 'incomplete men' but in the domestic area they had respect. This is made clear by writers on the role of the housewife such as Tusser. The household was in a real sense the woman's kingdom, and men gave their wives responsibility within that kingdom. But it was private, and by definition therefore it is more difficult for us to know about it. Nor were early Tudor women, like a few of their daughters at the end of the century, given to writing down their inner thoughts in journals which combined the mundane with the spiritual.³ Our knowledge of such women comes either by the chance survival of domestic papers, or by their occasional movement out of their private domestic world into the glare of the public world. Silence, in its widest sense, was probably the least restraining of the traditional constraints on women's behaviour. Women might break their silence because of random circumstance, deliberately, or by something in between. Mary Countess of Northumberland deliberately exposed

Faith and Physick: the life of a Tudor Gentlewoman (London 1993) p.8 for Mildmay
³ See Pollock, *With Faith and Physic* (Lady Mildmay) and D.M. Meads, ed *The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby* for late sixteenth century examples.

herself to the publicity of the royal court when she needed money, but her need for money was caused by the peculiarity of her late husband's financial dispositions, which she had not sought. Alice Avery deliberately used the Court of Star Chamber, but her alternatives might have been poverty or prostitution.

In a recent book Suzanne Hull has written 'Current scholarship concludes - perhaps wishfully - that women did *not* in fact act in accordance with the prescriptions given them'.⁴ As Hull implies, the answer is not quite that simple. It is easy to take an example or two of a conduct book and an example or two from real life, and conclude that women did, or did not, follow the prescriptive writers. It is suggested here that individual circumstances and individual personality influenced women's behaviour, and indeed that a woman might follow the prescriptions on one occasion and defy them on another.

However certain generalisations can be made. As might be expected, the evidence from the case studies here suggests that men, when they expressed a view, favoured the 'traditional' view of the behaviour appropriate for women. Men's ideological traditionalism could be a restraining influence on women, or it could simply illustrate a difference of opinion, where a man's only weapon was words. This was obviously most likely to be expressed where there was some conflict. The English agent in Spain, Cuerton, forced to try to unscramble the problem of Susan Clarencius's servant, made clear his disapproval of Susan's behaviour. He thought her high handed and uncaring, and possibly also financially devious. Thomas Cromwell, faced with Lady Lisle's apparent interference in the government of Calais, showed his disapproval of her actions, stating that she ought to know her place and that her behaviour was inappropriate for a woman. Clearly in his view the deputy's wife could be decorative and a gracious hostess, but should not try to influence policy. Honor Lisle, it could be said, was infringing the virtue of 'silence'. Similar views were expressed even more strongly by John Foxe when he wrote about Honor a generation later. Even in the more domestic sphere, men could express similar views. Both John and Otwell Johnson showed their irritation with Sabine when she overstepped the

⁴ Suzanne Hull *Women according to men: the world of Tudor-Stuart women* (Walnut Creek, California 1996) p. 195; for an example of this view, see Alison Wall, 'Elizabethan Precept and Feminine Practice: the Thynne family of Longleat' *History* vol 75 (1990)

mark in her demands for money, or when she apparently failed in her housewifely duties.

Generalisations become more difficult when women's reactions are considered. It must first be accepted that all the women studied here were living in a world where certain rules and certain limitations were understood, and their behaviour must be seen against this background. However, having said that, some women can be seen acting in different ways on different occasions. Jane Rochford for example displayed determination in seeking help from Cromwell, using the minister as a lever to gain money from her father in law, but at the same time she crawled quite shamelessly to Cromwell. She stressed her poverty and weakness as a poor widow, entirely dependent on his help. Here she was displaying contradictory positions at the same moment, weak and strong simultaneously. Jane was aware of the convention that saw widows as weak, and chose to use this to her own advantage. Jane may have broken the rules of wifely obedience to betray her husband, perhaps because she was not prepared to tolerate his actual or perceived infidelity. She certainly broke the rules of chastity by tolerating or even encouraging Katherine Howard in her relationship with Culpeper. Whether or not that relationship was consummated, it was clearly unchaste by the definitions of a writer such as Vives. Since Jane could be seen as being almost in a mother's position with regard to the younger woman, her duty was to protect and encourage Katherine in her marital chastity. This of course she quite notably failed to do.

Mary Countess of Northumberland was another woman who behaved in a variety of ways. In some respects she can be seen as the 'weakest' most 'feminine' and constrained of the women studied here, since she is seen almost entirely through the men with whom she was associated. As a girl she accepted an arranged marriage to an unwilling husband, and when that marriage failed she returned to the support of her original family. As a young wife she endured the dislike and even hatred of her husband, culminating in his imprisoning her. It is a reflection on the position of wives that her family while clearly disturbed by her relationship with Northumberland, do not seem to have threatened to take legal action against him. Though the exact reasons for the failure of the marriage are not clear, the Talbots were prepared to take Mary back and did their best to restore her financial status. Again Mary's submissive,

'feminine' position is made clear by the way that both her father and her brother worked to obtain recompense for her from the king. The king in turn reminded Mary of the traditional weakness of women by his comments about her father's failure to provide her dower. If the woman's family did not provide properly for a bride, it was not (in the king's view) the responsibility of her husband's heir to do this.

Despite the evidence of weakness and 'femininity' early in her life, Mary seems to have grown stronger with advancing age. Her audience with Queen Mary was more successful than her earlier one with Henry VIII, and while she was still evidently under the auspices of her family (she wrote from the Talbot house of Coldharbour) she reported to her brother on the interview herself. In her old age she insisted on sticking to her own religious faith though it had been proscribed. Here Mary was guided in her behaviour by her religious principles rather than by ideas of correct female conduct. She clearly gave her nephew a great deal of trouble by determining to go where she wanted and see whom she wanted, though again this offended against the new religious orthodoxy. It could be argued (as George Talbot himself insisted) that Mary had become senile, or at least mentally enfeebled. However it is noticeable that in her will she gave tokens of affection to her remaining sister, and to her great nephew, but not to her nephew the earl. This may represent petty spite, but it does suggest that whatever George implied she was still at least sometimes in control of her mental faculties, and was determined to make a small gesture of defiance against the man who was trying to control her life. Earl George's controls may really have been in Mary's best interests, to protect her from punishment for recusancy, but Mary evidently did not see things in quite the same way as her nephew. Much of her life had shown a correct feminine submission, silent and obedient at least to her father if not to her husband, but in old age Mary showed a different attitude towards masculine domination.

The life of Mary Countess of Northumberland is significant also for the light it sheds on marriage. The prescriptive writers on marriage required a wife to be obedient to her husband but also to love him, a love which was to be spiritual rather than sensual. The wrong kind of love could cause problems. Henry Percy's youthful love for Anne Boleyn was probably romantic, and may have been erotic, but is unlikely to have been particularly spiritual. The blighting of this love led to the

evidently reluctant marriage between Henry Percy and Mary Talbot. According to the rules of the conduct books, Mary was expected to develop a spiritual love for a man who had so recently been romantically in love with someone else. It is hardly surprising that Mary failed to do so, or that their relationship deteriorated to the point of collapse. If as has been suggested above, Mary did indeed suffer from epilepsy, then Percy's repulsion from a shameful disease will have been yet another factor in the equation.

Again, the conduct book writers would have had an answer for the situation. A good wife was expected to be devoted even to a diseased husband. The marriage service it will be recalled bound people 'in sickness and in health'. Vives' Clara Valdaura is an extreme example of this duty of devotion, especially as Vives made clear that Clara's husband was suffering from syphilis. Erasmus in his *Institution of Marriage* (available only in Latin in the period under consideration) was highly critical of parents who knowingly married their daughters to men with the pox, and placed great value on choosing a healthy spouse. None the less if an illness developed after marriage, it must be accepted. 'It is only right that a husband should tolerate in his wife something that, had the powers above so willed it, she might have had to tolerate in him.'⁵ Clearly Erasmus treated both partners equally in this respect, but again it is also clear that the woman would have no choice but to tolerate the situation, whereas the husband might have freedom (in practice if not in law) to abandon his wife.

The marriage of Henry Percy and Mary Talbot was clearly unhappy, but may have been an exceptional case.⁶ Certainly some marriages were happy by the standards of the sixteenth century and even by modern standards. Both the Lisle and the Johnson marriages, for example, were undoubtedly happy. Lord and Lady Lisle were mutually devoted and Lisle at least was prepared to express his devotion in letters to his wife. Similarly John and Sabine Johnson were happily married. There were certainly irritations and splashes of temper, but these were partly due to their separation. Separation might in itself cause stresses, but the need for mutual exchange

⁵ Erika Rummel, ed., *Erasmus on Women*, (Toronto & London 1996) p. 89

⁶ The daughters of the aristocracy were the group given least freedom in the choice of a marriage partner, although the consent of both parties was necessary. Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: modes of reproduction 1300-1840* (Oxford 1986) p. 140

of letters and the delays this entailed caused the magnification of minor problems. Despite this however there is clear evidence of mutual happiness, shown by the way that John missed his wife. The Johnsons' love probably was spiritual (as the advice writers would have wished) but there was a sensual element in it also.

Neither of the happy couples, the Lisles and the Johnsons, seem to have been trouble by their sexual feelings for their spouses. The medieval clerical repulsion for sex was extended to the laity in the prohibition of marital sex at certain times and seasons. A late echo of this was seen in the suggestion made by Erasmus that a newly married couple should begin their private relationship with prayer in which the new husband pledged his wife that 'our life together be pure and gentle, [that] our lovemaking be modest and infrequent'.⁷ William Harrington went further by recommending that the newly married couple should spend the first three nights of their marriage in prayer rather than 'fleshly medelyng together', but even he reassured his readers that this was a recommendation and not a law, so that those who did not follow his advice did not commit a sin.⁸ Historians have considered that the new less guilt-ridden attitude to sex was associated with the Protestants and particularly with the puritan Protestants.⁹ The later conduct books, while not advocating lust, no longer regarded marital sex as even slightly tainted with sin.¹⁰ The Johnsons, with their obvious pleasure in each other, were of course an evangelical family. The Lisles however seem to have shared the same feelings. Lady Lisle believed herself pregnant when in her early forties married to a man probably in his late sixties, and no one seems to have considered this in the least indecent. The Lisles, it should be recalled, were strongly conservative in their religious position. Thomas More may have believed his second marriage to an older widow gave him an excuse to practise marital celibacy, but the evidence from the Lisles suggests that it would be unwise to consider this in any way a general Catholic practice.

⁷ *Erasmus on Women*, p. 103

⁸ Harrington *Commendacions of matrimony* sig. A vi v.

⁹ See e.g. E. Lettes, 'The duty to desire: love friendship and sexuality in some Puritan theories of marriage' *Journal of Social History* vol. 15 (1981-2)

¹⁰ Patrick Collinson points out that the later advice for couples (in conduct books and wedding sermons) was typically given by 'family men' rather than by celibates. Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the sixteenth and seventeenth century* (Basingstoke 1991) p.68

The comments in the conduct books on the relationship between parents and children are fairly limited in scope. Breast feeding by the mother was commended, largely for moral reasons. Vives advocated an academic education for girls. All who touched on the subject reminded parents of their duty to guard the chastity of their daughters. Otherwise the parental relationship was little explored, except by Vives whose concern was above all that of maintaining chastity and training a girl to be a good wife. The child rearing practices of the sixteenth century have been the subject of controversy, with the extreme position being that of Philippe Aries and Lawrence Stone who believed that parents chose not to invest emotionally in small children who could so easily die. By keeping their emotional distance, parents protected themselves from unbearable grief. This emotional distance then allowed parents to treat their children as little adults, dressing them as miniature ladies and gentlemen for example, but also subjecting them to harsh physical and moral discipline. The opposing view expressed for example by Linda Pollock and Alan Macfarlane is that there is much evidence that parents did love their children, enjoyed their company and grieved deeply for their untimely deaths.¹¹ The cases studies contain considerable information on child rearing practices and parent-child relationships, but it is ambiguous. It is clear that the some of the conduct book principles such as the advocacy of maternal breast feeding were rejected. Aristocratic fashion in this regard was stronger than moralists' strictures. What is less clear is how close and affectionate the families actually were.

Some of the Lisle and Basset children were brought up away from their parents, but this does not in itself imply parental indifference. John Basset for example needed a legal education for his expected career as a well-connected landowner, which required him to spend some time at the Inns of Court. This would necessitate being away from home. The younger sons' education was more unusual, beginning in a traditional way with monastic or semi-monastic schooling, but then continuing with French tutors or French colleges. Honor Lisle appears to have valued the advantages of French experience over the increasingly fashionable attractions of Oxford and Cambridge. All of these options would have required the

¹¹ See e.g. Linda Pollock *Forgotten Children* (Cambridge 1983) and Alan Macfarlane *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (Oxford 1986)

boys to be away from home for considerable periods, but in Paris or St Omer the Basset boys would probably have found it easier to see their mother in the holidays than they would have done if they were still being educated in England, bearing in mind the vagaries of Channel crossings.

The daughters were not given an academic education, since Honor did not choose to follow that currently fashionable path in the training of girls. Far greater importance was placed on the acquisition of social polish and useful connections. The Deputy's household must have been capable of supplying some of these, and indeed three of the daughters (Frances Plantagenet and Philippa and Katherine Basset) did remain at home in Calais. Anne and Mary Basset though were sent away from home when quite young for the customary period of service, as was Katherine later, and there is evidence that Mary at least missed her mother. Lady Lisle would not have seen her actions as cruel or indifferent, but as furthering her daughters' long term advantages. Her affection for her children shows most clearly in the case of the spoilt youngest son James, but she had her children's interests at heart in the case of the girls as well. Only the case of Bridget (who was of course Honor's stepdaughter) really gives evidence of emotional indifference and even neglect by the child's parents.

The Johnsons, while not of so high a social position, still followed the traditional upper class child rearing practices. Babies were put out to wet nurses and spent long months away from their mother. Yet care was taken for the children's health. The suspicion of plague in the district led to a child being removed from the uncle and aunt with whom she was staying. Again, there was a suspicion of indulgence, when Sabine asked her husband to buy a doll for the baby Evangelist. At the same time Sabine was strict with her eldest daughter Charity (then about four) telling her uncle he must not let her have her own way too much. As with the Lisles, so with the Johnsons, the child-rearing methods used vary according to circumstances. The peculiar nature of the correspondence, which ceased when John Johnson was no longer based in Calais, means that we know little about the children's education. Sabine herself experienced the same period of 'service' in another family as the Basset girls did, but we have no evidence whether Sabine provided her daughters with this. The Johnsons' downward mobility after the bankruptcy may make this less likely, but this does not tell us whether or not Sabine would have approved of it.

Property was of prime importance to the women of the upper classes, and the defence of property was an important influence on the lives of several of these women. This applied at all stages of a woman's career, from the young girl whose marriage prospects were determined by the amount of dower likely to be provided with her, to the widow for whom a decent jointure made the difference between what a later generation called genteel poverty, and the prosperity which brought a kind of independence. The case studies and the legal cases show clearly that in matters involving property women did not always consider it appropriate to behave in the submissive, 'feminine' fashion of the gender model. The law, of course, regarded a married woman as subsumed into her husband in the context of property. During her husband's lifetime she had no property of her own, though her real property was protected and reverted to her at his death. The women who have been considered here had no choice but to accept this position, but having accepted it they could do their best to work around it. This might take the form of a woman being associated in a case together with her husband, as Anne Petre was.

Much energy could be shown by women, including wives, seeking to safeguard their property and property rights. Lady Lisle lobbied lawyers, officials and Thomas Cromwell himself when trying to protect her son's inheritance. Widows tried to prevent infringements of their rights by landlords, neighbours, family members and even their own sons. It is noteworthy that the court cases in which women did this did not contain overt criticism of the women's action on the grounds that it was unfeminine. Similarly when women were not so much protecting their property from depredations as pursuing their own ambitions, there was again no condemnation on the grounds that their action was not appropriate for women. A woman who was in a position to do so, like Susan Clarencius, might deliberately create an estate for her heirs, just as a man might do, and might also take steps to protect that estate from possible depredations. It would seem that the pursuit and defence of property rights overrode other considerations of suitable and expected behaviour. Women, it could be said, in the defence of their (or their children's) property behaved like men and were treated like men. The irony of this, that property provided positions of both great strength and great weakness to women, may be noted.

Two of the legal cases considered here show an intermingling of questions of property and of family relationships, specifically the relationships of elderly parents and adult children. The conduct book ideology, following the Ten Commandments, required that children should honour and respect their parents. Vives even gave the elderly woman a position of such respect that she was entitled to express her own critical opinions. In reality, once again this was not always obeyed. The two rather startling cases of Jane Poole and her daughter Anne Knevett, and the two Joan Denyses, show families deeply divided. Jane Poole and Anne Knevett may not ostensibly have been fighting about property, but Anne's fear of her stepfather's influence is implicit. Depending on the arrangements that Anne Knevett's father had made, Jane's new husband could have threatened Anne's position and inheritance. This led Anne to behaviour so extreme that it is difficult to see that it would have been acceptable even to those who were prepared to reject much of the conduct book teaching. The behaviour of Joan Denys the daughter-in-law against her first husband's parents was again so extreme as to seem extraordinary in the context of the conduct books. In a different sphere of activity, though again concerning property, the case of Alice Avery was also a reversal of what might be expected. These cases demonstrate that on some occasions women were sufficiently determined on their own ends that they entirely ignored the prescriptions of the conduct books.

An area where some women chose to ignore the prescriptive view of how they should behave was religion. Women were supposed to be pious and devout, but in a quiet, modest way. One group of women, the Protestant martyrs, however ignored the normal constraints on female behaviour and instead chose to follow their religious principles whatever the consequence. If this could be combined with their normal duties as wives and mothers, then all well and good, but if there was a conflict of interest, then 'service to the Lord [took] priority over duties to spouse, children and community'.¹² Foxe the martyrologist seemed to approve of this, repeating the story of a mother and wife who protested that despite the attractions of spouse and child she was 'minded for the love of Christ and his trueth to stande to the extremitie of the matter'.¹³ Only by doing this could a woman achieve her complete spiritual

¹² Ellen Macek 'The emergence of feminine spirituality in the *Book of Martyrs*' *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19 (1988)

¹³ Macek, op. cit, citing Foxe, *Acts and Martyrs* (1563 ed.) pp. 1270-71

fulfilment. Foxe did though have some difficulty with the undoubted spiritual achievement of the women martyrs. He found it hard to believe that God did 'animate their womanshe and wyvishe hartes, into a bolde and manlye stomacke',¹⁴ and believed that it was a special sign of His grace that God should have chosen these women, since women were naturally the 'weaker vessel' spiritually as well as in other ways. However, despite the example of the martyrs, it has to be said that the women studied for this thesis do not exhibit this level of religious commitment. Sabine Johnson, the only overt Protestant in the group, was the sister of a martyr, but there is no indication that she was tempted to follow his example.¹⁵ For most of the women studied here religion seems to have been a conventional, perhaps an important, but not an overwhelming part of their lives. Ironically the woman who came nearest to martyrdom was the Catholic aristocrat Mary Countess of Northumberland with her insistence on maintaining the practices of the old religion under the new Protestant regime

All women as has been shown lived against the same moral background, typified above as 'chastity, silence and obedience'. Poor women were in many ways the least constrained by this, since they were required to take part in the daily tasks of household, farm or trade, and might indeed earn an independent (or partially independent) living as for example a market woman or an innkeeper. 'Silence' was not appropriate for these women, though a reputation for chastity was as prized by the poor woman as by her rich neighbour. The rich, upper class women who have been the primary subject of this thesis normally lived a private life, where 'silence' at least towards the outside world was part of their everyday life. In a few cases women tried to break their silence by writing and even publishing books, but the constraints surrounding them allowed only certain safe kinds of work such as translation. Occasionally however a woman (for various possible reasons) raised her head above the parapet of her private life into the public world. Only in this instance do we have a chance to learn anything substantial about her. This is when we learn how she related to the moral background, the 'image' prescribed for her by the advice writers. It is clear that women's responses were varied. They varied with the situation, they varied

¹⁴ Macek op. cit. citing Foxe, *Act and Monuments* (1563) pp. 1570-1571

¹⁵ The martyr Joyce Lewys was converted to the reformed belief after seeing Laurence Saunders' death. Macek, op. cit. p. 69

with the individual, and for any particular woman they could vary from time to time. No woman could afford simply to ignore the prescriptive image, but their acceptance of it was far from uniform.

Appendix 1 The use of the equity courts by women¹⁰⁵

TABLE ONE Chancery Decree Rolls C78/1-14 (from Calendars)

Ref	Regnal Year	Total no. of cases	Total cases with women	% cases with women	Plaintiffs women alone	Plaints. women with men	Defes. women alone	Defes. women with men
C78/1	35-38 Hen VIII	91	33	36%	11	11	5	6
C78/2	26-36 Hen VIII	107	41	38%	11	14	5	14
C78/3	34-38 Hen VIII	112	35	31%	6	15	4	11
C78 4	1-3 Edward VI	115	28	24%	12	12	0	5
C78 5	1-5 Edward VI	79	27	34%	10	10	5	4
C78 6	3-7 Edward VI	92	31	34%	7	11	8	8
C78 7	5-7 Edward VI	64	28	44%	6	11	4	9
C78 8	1-7 Edward VI	40	16	40%	4	5	5	5
C78 9	1&2-2&3 P&M	82	25	30%	8	12	2	4
C78 10	1&2-4&5 P&M	68	21	31%	4	7	3	7
C78 11	3&4 P&M	48	12	25%	1	6	2	4
C78 12	4&5-5&6 P&M	50	12	24%	3	7	0	2
C78 13	1M - 5&6 P&M	84	34	40%	8	15	1	15
C78 14	2&3-5&6 P&M	65	15	23%	1	10	1	6
Total cases		1097	358	Average % 33%	92	146	45	80
As % of all cases					8%	13%	4%	7%
As % of cases with women					26%	41%	13%	22%

¹⁰⁵ Discrepancies in the total numbers of cases involving women are caused by the involvement of women on both sides of some cases. All percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

TABLE TWO Cases in Star Chamber
STAC 3/1 to STAC 3/8 Reign of Edward VI

Ref	Total no. of cases	Total cases with women	% of cases women	Plaintiffs women alone	Plaintiffs women with men	Defendants women alone	Defendants women with men
STAC 3/1	112	30	27%	7	12	0	14
STAC 3/2	85	28	33%	1	11	0	17
STAC 3/3	86	25	29%	7	10	0	8
STAC 3/4	94	26	28%	8	9	0	10
STAC 3/5	85	14	16%	5	7	0	6
STAC 3/6	114	18	16%	5	8	0	5
STAC 3/7	104	15	14%	6	6	1	4
STAC 3/8	54	9	17%	4	2	2	1
Totals of cases	734	165	Average % with women 22%	43	65	3	65
As % of all cases				6%	9%	0.1%	9%
As % of cases with women				26 %	39 %	2%	39%

TABLE THREE Cases in Requests
From REQ 1 9, appearance lists for 6 Edward VI. [In some cases only one party, defendant or plaintiff, is given]

Date	Total no. of cases	Total cases with women	% cases with women	Male plaintiffs	Female plaintiffs	Male defendants	Female defendants
Hilary term	32	5	16%	12	5	33	0
Easter term	33	4	12%	31	3	34	1
Trinity term	13	2	15%	12	1	15	1
Michaelmas term	11	4	36%	3	3	17	1
Totals of cases	89	15	Average % with women 17%	58	12	99	3
Average % of all cases				65%	13%	111%	3%

Appendix 2

Complete List of cases studied for the thesis

PRO Ref no.	Plaintiff(s)	Defendant(s)	Brief details
C 78/1/38	Elizabeth Webbe	Robert Webbe	Widow's rights, dower
C 78/1/40	William Petre and wife Anne	William Browne	Daughter's right of inheritance ¹
C 78/2/75	Jane Tyrrell	Humphrey Tyrrell	'Divorce' settlement
C 1/1188/13	Richard Alcocke and wife Johan	Humphrey Moy and other men	Daughter's rights, evidences
C1/1188/25	Chrystyan Ambros	Thomas Swayne and Thomas Keyne	Widow's rights, ² evidences
C1/1188 34-35	Alice Androwe	Geoffrey Mayowe	Daughter's rights, evidences
C1 1189 30-32	Juliana Alyn	John Udy and Robert Tregennow	Daughter's rights, evidences
C1 1189 33	Nicholas Alyngton and wife Elizabeth	Thomas Abbote	Adminstrators of estate, evidences
C1 1189 51-3	Anne Arden	William Arden	}Quarrel over }inheritance of land
C1 1189 54-57	William Arden	Anne Arden	}Evidences
C1 1189 59	Alys Atkanson		Daughter's rights
C1 1189 62	James Aspenall and wife Margerye and Agnes Verdon (her sister)	Thomas Verdon	Daughters' rights, evidences
C1 1189 68	Thomas Audley	Alice Kett and others	Evidences
STAC 3/1/20	Henry Mylwarde & others	Elizabeth Halsey	Enclosure
STAC 3 1 24	Joan Hynton & her son Thomas Hynton	Sir Thomas Essex & wife Dame Margaret	Knocking down a wall
STAC 3/1/44	Robert Harrison	Elizabeth Yerborough	Enclosure
STAC 3/1/48	Jane Coryton	Richard Coryton (her son)	Forcible entry, widow's rights
STAC 3/1/65	Elizabeth Yerborough	Robert Harrison	Enclosure
STAC 3/1/82	Dame Jane Poole	Dame Anne Knevett (her daughter)	Family quarrel
STAC 3/2/80	Eleanor Culleyn	John Mechyn & John Hall	Daughter's rights
STAC 3/3/29	Katherine Sayer	Richard Chamonde	Kidnapping of son
STAC 3/3/59	Alice Avery	John Mershe	Claim for property as belonging to Alice not her late 'husband'

PRO Ref. No.	Plaintiff(s)	Defendant(s)	Brief Details
STAC 3/3/79	Anne Rondell	George & John Seyntclere & Johane Fford (their mother)	Unlawful killing of plaintiff's husband and harbouring his killer
STAC 3/4/10	Margaret Yarde	John Ingledon	Widow's rights
STAC 3/4/40	Elizabeth Trefraneck	Richard Hoskyn & others	Widow's rights
STAC 3/5/1	Elizabeth Beaumont	John Bevercote	Widow's rights (a previous quarrel between husband and defendant)
STAC 3/5/12	Elizabeth Bayly	Alice Croke	Widow's rights. forcible eviction
STAC 3/5/18	Joan Denys	John Stephyn & wife Joan Stephyn (alias Denys)	Family quarrel
STAC 3 5 42	Anne Ffermer	Thomas Myller	Widow's rights, jointure land
STAC 3 5 61	Chrystyan Grove	Thomas Wroughton	Widow's rights
STAC 3 5 65	Thomas Clifford & Robert Harrison	Elizabeth Yerborough	Enclosure
REQ 1 9 f12 ³	Richard Fysshher gent. & wife Anne	Nicholas Adams gent.	Dower money retained by fiance after marriage cancelled
REQ 1 9 f16	Johane Gully	Nicholas Gully	Widow's rights
REQ 1 9 f19	John Rumbolde & wife Johane	Edward Whale	Widow's rights (claim after re-marriage)
REQ 1 9 f21	John Whyte and wife Anne	Thomas Watson	Daughter's rights
REQ 1 9 f22	John Whyte and wife Anne	John Willett	Daughter's rights
REQ 1 9 f24	Richard Rollesley	Isabell Rollesley (mother of plaintiff)	Widow's rights
REQ 1/9 f32	Elen Harte	Thomas Harte	Widow's rights - specifies need to 'live sole and chaste'
REQ 1 9 f36	John Standerwycke & wife Anne	John Halswell	Evidences
REQ 1/9/f39	Johane Glover	Williams Goodwin & others	land dispute (widow's rights ?)
REQ 1/9/f40	Elizabeth Wodlis	Sir Humphrey Browne	Widow's rights (trade)
REQ 1/9/f50	Johane Yorke	Henry Porteman	Daughter's rights (Johane described simply as dau. of Mawde Yorke)
REQ 1/9/f51	Anthony Chapman & wife Elizabeth	Peter Dunne	Widow's rights (re first marriage)

PRO Ref. No.	Plaintiff(s)	Defendant(s)	Brief Details
REQ 1/9/f55	Customary tenants of Northey etc, including Elyn Rayner & Johane Carpynter	Sir John Rybalt	Enclosure, common rights
REQ 1/9/f65	Agnes Sybley	Anthony Merydale	Land dispute, inheritance
REQ 1/9/f69	Thomas Symmes & wife Elizabeth	Maurice Stayre & wife Katherine	Daughters' rights as co-heiresses (women here were sisters)
REQ 1/9/f70	Elyn Pendry	Mary Claypole & John Magnus	Rights of inheritance as cousin

¹ 'Daughter's rights' refers to property claimed by a woman by inheritance from her father.

² 'Widow's rights' refers to property claimed by a woman as dower etc from her husband

³ Where a folio reference is given, only the first folio of the case is noted here

Appendix 3

Lady Rochford's Property

There are three short lists of Lady Rochford's possessions. P.R.O. S.P. 1/104/82 is a list from May 1536 of assorted property left in a chest in the chamber over the kitchen. The page has been torn on the left hand side and the first words of some lines are missing. P.R.O. S.P. 1/167/163-163v is of property which had belonged to her, listed presumably after her death. The document is badly faded, particularly the reverse side, and the list of jewels given below is completed with the aid of *Letters and Papers*, where this part only is printed. The third list, P.R.O. E.315/160/104-105 is a record of bedding received into the royal wardrobe after her death.

P R O. S P. 1/104/82

die May . . . h. viij xxviiij

Thez parcelles of Stuff here being wrytten ben the Lady Rochefords And they doue remayne a chest beyng in the chambr over the kechen

a pear Slyvez of crymsen velvett set wt goldsmythez [work]

a pear Slyvez of cheker damaske whitt

a pear slyves of blak velvet wt eight pear aglettes . . . enamyled wt blak . . . gold

pear Slyvez of crymsen satten

a pear Slyvez of yoloes satten

Item a pear Slyvez of a Satten whitt

Item a pear Slyvez of cloth of silver

Item a pear Slyvez of Tynxell Crymsen

Item a pear Slyvez of Tynxell blak

Item a plackard of tynxell

Item a plackard of blak velvet

Item a plackard of velvet of car [sic] carnassion colour

Item a plackard of tawney velvet

. . . a plackard of crymsen satten

. . . a plackard of whitt satten

Item ij plackardes of russett satten

Item a plackard of blak damask

Item a Prymer borded wt silver & gilt wt one clasp

Item ij pear knyvez wt shethez of blak velvet

Item a fote of silver and gilt of a Ivory coffer

Item a pear of broken bedes of gold and perle

Item a pear broken bedes of gold and whitt bone

Item a pear of lawnez

Item a boke covered wt blak velvet and a clasp of silver

Item a boke covered wt crymsen velvet

Item a pear of knyht hosez of whit silke wrought wt gold for maskyng

. . . ij squarez of black velvett }

. . . one square of satten whitt } in a case

. . . ij squares of satten crymsen }

P.R.O. S.P. 1/167/163-163v [see also *L.P.* vol. 16 no. 1340]

List of plate, apparel and jewels which were the Lady of Rochford's

Plate

A payre of flagones of sylver wherof one lacketh a stople
A salt of sylver and gilt wt owt a cover
A newer of stone wout a cover wt a hope of sylver and gilt
An nother newer of stone wt cover hope and fote of sylver
a bason and an Ewer of sylver parcel gilt
A litle tase of sylver
A Casting botle of sylver and gilte
A litle crewes of sylver [this item seems to have been deleted]

Apparel

A kirtel of black velvet
A kirtle of black saten
A nyght gowne of black taffeta
A gown of black damaske
A gown of black saten
iij fayre bordures of my ladyes of goldsmithes work black enameled
xviiij fayre perles
A fayre broche black enamelled wt six small diamondes
A litle stele casket wt a purse and forty pounds in it
v perles and certyn peces of broken gold in a box
xi small perles

Jewels

A broach wt an agate
A cross of dyamonds with three perles pendant
A flower of Rubies
A flower wt a ruby and a great emerald wt a perle pen[dant]
A tablet of gold wt black, grene and whit enamelled
A pair of brasselletts of red cornelyns
A pair of bedes of gold and stones
A broch of gold wt an antique hed and a whit face

P R.O. E. 315/160/104-105

Stuff Receyved by the said Nicholas Bristowe that was the late Lady Rochefords and hereafter delivered in charge by the kinges comaundement unto the said Anthony Denny terciodecimo die Maij Anno predic dni Rege Henrici octavi tricesimo quarto

Item oone Ceeler and Tester with iij single vallaunces all sowed togethere of carnacion vellat embrandered with cloth of silver lyned with red buckeram / the Ceeler being in length ij yerdes quartar and in bredith oone yerde iij qurt & iij nailes¹ the Tester being in depth oone yerde iij qurt and iij nailes and of the bredith aforesaid

¹ A nail was a measure of length for cloth of two and a quarter inches. R. E. Zupko, *A dictionary of English weights and measures* (Madison, Milwaukee & London 1968)

the vallaunce frenged with a depe freng of red and whyte silke paned together and lyned with red and white damaske likewise paned
[in margin] Item thes two to Ed prigten pd

Item oone Ceeler Tester and vi single vallaunces all sowed togethere of white satten and yellowe sarceoinet embrandered thone upon thother enter changeably with rabaske work² and lyned with Canvas the ceeler being in length ij yerdes & qurt scant and in bredith oone yerde & quart The tester being in depth oone yerde qurt scant and of the bredth aforesaid / the said vallaunces being frenged with a depe freng of yellowe and white silk paned together wth v curtens of yellow and white sarceonet likewise paned being bredith v yerdes iij qrts and everoone being in depth oone yerde iij qrts

Item oone bed stede of wodd painted & gilt with burnished golde being in length ij yerdes qrt & in bredith ij yerdes & qrt having ceeler Tester vj single vallaunces and thre bases of white Satten alover embrandered with trayles of tawny cloth of golde / and with the lorde Rochfordes knottes upon the seames / the vallaunce frenged with a depe freng of yellowe and white silke and at thende with a narrowe freng of the same silke with v curtens of red and white damaske paned together being in bredith vij yerdes & qrt every oone being in depth ij yerdes & qrt scant with oone Bed and a bolster of tyke filled with ffethers the bed being in bredith ij yerdes and qrt scant and in length ij yerdes qrt and iij nailes / the bolster being in bredith iij qrts and oone naile of a yerde and in length ij yerdes

Two pillows of ffustian filled with downe either of them being of oone bredith of the same fustian and in length oone yerde scant foure quiltes of lynen clothe filled with woll two of them either being of ij bredithes qrt of the same cloth and in length ij yerdes qrt and thother two either of them being of ij bredthes of the same clothe and in length ij yerdes qrt & oone pair of ffustians either of them being of v bredthes of the same ffustian and in length iij yerdes iij quarters

And oone Counterpoint of yellowe sarceonet quilted and lyned with yellow buckeram being in bredith iij yerdes iij nailes and in length iij yerdes [in margin]

Item thole to Willm Tyldesley

² Rabaske is a variant of rebeske, meaning arabesque. Cotgrave (1611) defined this as a 'small and curious flourishing'. Cotgrave is the earliest instance of the word cited by the OED.

Appendix Four

Alice Avery's Property (P.R.O. STAC 3/3/59) see pp.102 -103 in the Law Chapter Two schedules were provided as evidence before the Court of Star Chamber, Alice Avery's own list, and the list given by John Mershe the sheriff, which is described as a list of Thomas Kemys' goods.

1) Alice Avery's List

In the hall

[The top of the page is torn making the first item illegible]

Item a standing bedd	ij s [the amount is torn and may not be ij]
Item a flocke bedd	x s
Item a doble canvas	ij s
Item a coverlett	iiij s
Item a hanging paynted	ij s

In the parler

Item a cobert	x s
Item a joyned table	vii s
Item one joyned fourme	ii s
Item a Carpett	iiii s
Item a Jak to sett a bason apon	vii d
Item a Joyned Cheyre	viii s
Item one other Cheyre	xvj d
Item iij Joyned Stooles	xviiij d
Item a syde sadle	ix s
Item a greate Cheste	xij s
Item a nother Cheste	xiiij s
Item a nother Cheste	iiij s
Item a nother Cheste	ij s viii d

In the hall

Item a table withe Tressells	ij s viii d
Item a Carpett	ij s iiij d
Item a fourme	xv d

In the parler

Item a Carpett to the Coberde	ii s viij d
Item A payre of brandeiron	viiij s
Item A payre of fyre tonges	xvj d
Item A fyre shovell	xvj d
Item A gredeiron	viiij d
Item ij Spyttes	ij s
Item one Cobbe iron	xij d
Item A Ketell	vj s
Item ij brasse pottes	vj s
Item haulf a garnyshe of poyter	xvj s

Item iiij bell candelstikes	v s iijd
Item iiij pottes coverde	xx d
Item A Bason	ii s
Item vj li of bacon	ii s vjd
Item vyrkyn of butter	x s
Item boshell & a haulfe of otmell	iiij s iiiij d
Item iiij porrengers	xx d
Item ij Salte Sellers	ij s iiiij d
Item A Bottel of Tynne	viiij d
Item ij pewter pottes	xiiiij d
Item a letherne bottell	viiij d
Item ij bylles	ii s viiiij d
Item A halberd	iiij s iiiij d
Item haulf A dosen of sylver spones	xxx s
Item A Cuppe of Sylver	L s
Item A frok gardid wt velvett	xl s
Item ij faces of foynes ³	xxx s
Item A kertell of worsted	x s
Item ij pettye cotes of bastard skarlet	xxvj s
Item a tent	vj li
Item an obligation of xvij li	
Item a livery kote gynger coler	x s
Item a Cappe	xx d
Item a Walshe harpe	v s
Item paynted clothes	xl s
Item iiij lynnens	xx s
Item A boultng tube ⁴ ij wasshinge bowles & ij wasshinge tobbes	vi s iiiij d
Item A white pettie kote of my chylde	ij s

Other stuffs that I had in keping of Mr John Bechams of Cornewell esquyre

Item a new velvett kote edgid wt parchement lase of golde	iiij li xiiij s iiiij d
Item a gowne of Russells garded wt velvet and ffasid wt fyne budge ⁵	iiij li
Item a hernes for A greate horsse of lether hongen Color Redd	viiij s

³ foin or foyne was a type of fur, from a polecat or weasel

⁴ boultng was sifting, so a boultng tub was presumably a kind of sieve

⁵ budge was lambskin worn with the curly fur outwards. Both budge and foynes were low grade furs exempt from the sumptuary regulations

2) John Mershe's List

Item A Standing bede
Item A ffether bede
Item A paere of Blankettes
Item A coverlett
Item A hangyng of bakeram and the cortten rodde
Item an other standing bede
Item A ffether bed
Item A coverlett
Item courtens of bay and certayn rodde
Item A Trokell bed
Item A fether bede therin
Item one blankett
Item A quylted coverlett
Item A standing bedd
Item A coverlett
Item A hangyng paynted
Item A copberde
Item A yoyned table
Item A yoyned forme
Item A Carpytt
Item A Jacke to sett a basen uppon
Item A yoyned chere
Item on other cheyre
Item A syde Sadle
Item A grete cheste
Item one other cheste
Item ij chestes more
Item a carpett to the cupborde
Item a payre of brandeyrons
Item a payre of ffyre tonges
Item a fyer showell
Item a grydiron
Item a spyte
Item a cobeyron
Item a Kettill
Item ij brasse pottes
Item in puter iiij dysshes ij platters one square dyshe on burned dyshe ij sausers
Item ij bell candylstyckes and one other candellstycke
Item iiij pottes covered
Item one basen

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