‘All wemen in thar degree shuld to thar men suibectit be’:
The controversial court career of Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton, c. 1547-1565

Helen Joanne Graham-Matheson, BA, MA.

Thesis submitted to UCL for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Declaration

I, Helen Joanne Graham-Matheson confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
Abstract

This thesis reconstructs and analyses the life and agency of Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton (1526-1565), with the aim of increasing understanding of women’s networks of influence and political engagement at the mid-Tudor courts, c. 1547-1565. Analysis of Elisabeth’s life highlights that in the absence of a Queen consort the noblewomen of the Edwardian court maintained and utilized access to those in power and those with political significance and authority. During the reign of Mary Tudor, Elisabeth worked with her natal family to undermine Mary’s Queenship and support Elizabeth Tudor, particularly by providing her with foreign intelligence. At the Elizabethan court Elisabeth regained her title (lost under Mary I) and occupied a position as one of the Queen’s most trusted confidantes and influential associates. Her agency merited attention from ambassadors and noblemen as well as from the Emperor Maximilian and King Erik of Sweden, due to the significant role she played in several major contemporary events, such as Elizabeth’s early marriage negotiations.

This research is interdisciplinary, incorporating early modern social, political and cultural historiographies, gender studies, social anthropology, sociology and the study of early modern literature. The chronology of Elisabeth’s activity is drawn chiefly from primary material. Research has uncovered c. 110 individual original documents directly relating to Elisabeth - many of which have not previously been printed elsewhere. Through the use of digital resources and extensive archival research, this thesis makes an intervention in the history and historiography of the reigns of Edward VI, Mary I and Elizabeth I: the reintegration of Elisabeth’s activity into these reigns reveals the lacunae in scholarship on early modern women.
Acknowledgements

It is often said that doing a PhD is lonely and solitary, but that has been far from my experience. My circumstances over the last four years have been unorthodox but they have enabled me to meet more people and share more ideas, so I have been lucky, and will always be grateful. The following are just a few small mentions of people who have had a particular impact on me and my work, who I would like to acknowledge and thank. To everyone else, I hope you know, but just in case - thank you.

I would like to thank:

• the British Federation of Women Graduates for funding my research.

• the librarians and archivists at (among others) Hever Castle, the Cumbria Archive Services, the Centre for Kentish Studies, the Surrey History Centre, the British Library and The National Archives (TNA), with a special note to Dr Katy Mair for advice, discussion and archival detective skills, without which I might not have uncovered all the information presented in this thesis.

• everyone at the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters (CELL) (particularly Clare, James, Kirsty, Lizzy, Matt, Nydia and Will) - for the coffee, cake and conversation over the last four years.

• academic friends and colleagues who have variously read drafts, discussed ideas and offered words of advice, including Dr Stephanie Downes, Dr Carrie Griffin, Dr Nadine Akkerman, Dr Daniel Starza Smith, Dr Ruth Ahnert and Dr Clare Whitehead.

• all at University College London and Queen Mary University of London, especially Dr David Colelough, Dr Tamara Atkin and Professor Julia Boffey who acted as interim supervisors. I gratefully acknowledge their support and continued interest.

• Professor Helen Hackett and Dr John Guy for extensive feedback and guidance that have undoubtedly shaped what follows.

• the many wonderful academics I have met and talked with throughout my studies. I would particularly like to thank Professor Ralph Houlbrooke, Professor James Daybell, Professor Steve May, Professor Jackie Eales, Professor Cathy Shrank, Dr Alan Bryson, Dr Gemma Allen and Dr Alison Wiggins, all of whom provided insights that feature in what follows.

• my supervisors, Professor Lisa Jardine and Dr Robyn Adams. I would like to thank Lisa sincerely for her vision, for taking a chance on me and welcoming me to CELL, and for always seeing my thesis and ideas as part of a bigger picture and a future academic career. She is the woman from whom I have drawn my methodology, and by whom I will always be inspired. Robyn I would like to thank for her commitment, to me and to the details of my thesis. No other supervisor’s biting comments would make me laugh out loud! I can’t count the hours of cake and sympathy across the last three years - your academic and personal support will never be forgotten. To you both - thank you for everything.

• my family - my mother, father, sister and grandmother - for all their support, emotional and financial, across these last three - but actually all - years of my education, and my academic career to date. To Martyn, who has always been there for me, even when very far away and for whom Elisabeth Parr has been the other woman. I could not have done it without you all.

This thesis is about a strong woman, and through its formation I have been influenced by and privileged to work with so many inspiring women, but above all there has been one. This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Dr Lynne Graham-Matheson - my ‘Dr Mummy,’ whose own PhD planted the initial idea, who has been with me through everything, supporting me in any way I could have asked for and more, and rallying me with affirmations of ‘trust me, I’m a Dr’. This thesis is because of you, and for you, with my thanks and all my love.
Contents

Volume I:
Declaration 2
Abstract 3
Acknowledgements 4
Contents 5
List of illustrations 6
Transcription policy and a note on dates 6
List of Abbreviations 7
Chapter 1: Introduction 8
Chapter 2: Elisabeth Parr - a reconstruction 37
Chapter 3: Quasi-consorts and rival courts, 1547-1553 90
Chapter 4: Political Protestants and female networks, 1553-1558 138
Chapter 5: Confidantes and counsellresses, 1558-1565 168
Chapter 6: Conclusion 216

Volume II:
Appendices
Appendix A: Documents relating to Elisabeth Parr 2
Appendix B: Elisabeth Parr - a source book 6
Appendix C: Visualisations 20
Appendix D: Biographies of key figures 24

Bibliography 32
List of illustrations

1. Hever MS Hours f.37v. With kind permission from Hever Castle, Kent. Copyright Anna L. Spender.
2. SP 70/40 f. 40 (stamped 219), Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton to Thomas Chaloner, 26 June 1562. State Papers Online, Gale, Cengage Learning, copyright © 2011. Reproduced by kind permission of The National Archives.
3. Folger Shakespeare Library, Losley MS LB.455, Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton to William More, [1551?]. Copyright the Folger Shakespeare Library.
5. The Cobham Family portrait, Longleat. Attributed to the master of the countess of Warwick, 1567. Reproduced with kind permission of the Marquess of Bath.
6. Portrait medal of Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton
7. Images of the tomb of George and Anne Brooke, Lord and Lady Cobham, St Mary’s church, Cobham, Kent. Copyright Martyn Pollock.
8. W. M. Elderton, A proper new balad in praise of my Ladie Marques, Whose death is bewailed, To the tune of a lusty gallant, copyright © 2003-2013 ProQuest LLC. All Rights Reserved.

Transcription policy and a note of the date

In all quotations for early modern manuscripts cited throughout this thesis I have expanded contractions and suspensions and denoted them with italics. Strikethroughs and crossings-out have been retained where the sense of the document would have been altered when the alternative text would have been significant. All superscriptions and insertions have been replaced in the main text and denoted by ellipses. Spelling in quotations has been left as in the manuscripts in order to preserve the textual idiosyncrasies contained within the correspondence. Quotations from correspondence in languages other than English appear or are discussed in the main text in translation. The original language quotations can be found in Appendix B.

Dates are preserved in the Old Style throughout, but New Year’s Day is taken to begin on 1 January in order to cohere sequences of letters written between England and Continental Europe.
List of abbreviations - people, texts and repositories used repeatedly throughout this text

KBDuS - Katherine Brandon (Bertie), duchess of Suffolk
GBLC - George Brooke, Lord Cobham
WBLC - William Brooke, Lord Cobham
CV - Holy Roman Emperor Charles V
HC - Henry Cobham
TC - Thomas Chaloner
WC - William Cecil
JDCoW/DuN - Jane Dudley, countess of Warwick, duchess of Northumberland
JDEoW/DoN - John Dudley, earl of Warwick, duke of Northumberland
NG - Nils Gyllenstierna, Chancellor of Sweden
KE - King Edward VI
WM - William More
EPMoN - Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton
WPMoN - William Parr, marquess of Northampton
KP - Katherine Parr, dowager Queen, Lady Sudeley
GdS - Habsburg ambassador, Guzman de Silva
ASDuS - Anne Seymour, duchess of Somerset
ESDuS - Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset, Lord Protector
AT - Anne Throckmorton
NT - Nicholas Throckmorton
VdV - Habsburg ambassador, Van der Delft
BdQ - Habsburg ambassador, Bishop de Quadra
FI - Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I
MDuP - Margaret, duchess of Parma and regent of the Netherlands
MII - Holy Roman Emperor Maximillian II
QM - Queen Mary I
QE - Queen Elizabeth I

BL - British Library
CSP Foreign - Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, Edward VI, 1547-1553, ed. Turnbull, W. B., (London, 1861); Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, Elizabeth, 1558-1589, ed. Stevenson, J. et al 23 volumes (London, 1863-1950); Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Mary, 1553-1558, ed. Turnbull, W. B. (London, 1861)
PC - Privy Council
SP - State Papers
TNA - The National Archives
Chapter 1: Introduction

At Hever Castle in Kent there is a manuscript *Book of Hours*, use of Sarum, written in Latin on vellum and produced in Belgium c. 1450.¹ It was beautifully illustrated and illuminated in the workshop of the Master of the Golden Scrolls.² The manuscript is a well-known tourist attraction, and frequently referred to by scholars and others interested in Henry VIII’s second Queen, Anne Boleyn, because the volume bears what is believed to be the sole surviving example of Anne’s intact autograph and a poignant inscription ‘le temps viendra’ - the time will come - written c. 1520.³ It was this *Book of Hours* that led to this thesis. Present in the manuscript’s folios are seven other inscriptions dating from the Tudor period, including one by the celebrated Elizabethan ambassador, Henry Cobham, and two by his sister, Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton, one of which reads

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{my hart is sowry even} \\
\text{in lafter and the ende} \\
\text{of Joye is hevynes.} \\
\text{your humbell and loufyng daughter} \\
\text{E Northampton.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

The other is the phrase ‘the fear of men kepeithe the men from evil’ transliterated in Greek script but recognisably in the same italic hand. This pair of inscriptions was the catalyst for this study. Who was ‘E Northampton’? How had she come to inscribe such a manuscript? What relationship did she have to the other inscribers and they to the *Book of Hours* itself?

‘E Northampton’ was Elisabeth Parr née Cobham, marchioness of Northampton (1526-1565). Elisabeth’s inscriptions paint an intriguing picture of her as a woman who could read and write proficiently - potentially in more than one language - and who was comfortable both composing poetry and engaging with a medieval manuscript that would have been politically sensitive, and materially and culturally valuable, even in the mid-

---

¹ ‘Use of Sarum’ denotes a specific wording in the Hours services contained within the manuscript and probably means that the manuscript was intended for use in England (Sarum is Latin for Salisbury). Other recognised ‘uses’ included Paris and Rome.

² For an image of the inscriptions from the manuscript *Book of Hours* see fig. 1, 83.

³ Anne Boleyn’s inscription appears in *The Hever Manuscript Hours*, f. 98v. Her inscription also appears as the only inscription in *The Hever Printed Hours*, 1528 which reads ‘Remember me when you do pray that hope doth lead from day to day. Anne Boleyn’. The third inscribed *Book of Hours* features Anne alongside other inscriptions including one by Henry VIII; BL Kings MS 9, f. 231v. Anne’s inscription - likely written to Henry himself - is positioned under an illustration of the Annunciation and reads, ‘Be dayly prove you shall me fynde / To be to you bothe loyynge and kynde’. See also James P Carley, *The Books of Kings Henry VIII and his Wives* (London: British Library, 2004), 105-8.

⁴ *The Hever Manuscript Hours*, f. 37v.
sixteenth century.\(^5\) Equally clear is that Elisabeth valued her family, and demonstrated this by communicating with or commemorating them in such a specific space as the pages of the family *Book of Hours*. Elisabeth is a peripheral figure in Tudor historiography; passing references to her can be found in various sources, but these have never been comprehensively drawn together. This thesis provides the first extended biography of Elisabeth Parr, but, in so doing, contributes to the striking picture of female agency and political engagement at the mid-Tudor courts.\(^6\)

Elisabeth Parr was born in 1526 to George Brooke (c. 1497-1558), Lord Cobham and Anne née Bray (1501-1558). Elisabeth arrived at the court of Henry VIII around 1542, and supposedly briefly caught the attention of the King between his fifth and sixth marriages. Beginning around 1543 Elisabeth was involved in a relationship with William Parr, earl of Essex, later marquess of Northampton (1513-1571), the married brother of Queen Katherine Parr, in whose household Elisabeth served. Elisabeth and William’s relationship - that is, their efforts to secure William a divorce from Anne Bourchier, daughter and sole heiress of Henry Bourchier, earl of Essex, in order that Elisabeth and William could marry, and their battle to remain married across the Somerset Protectorate and the Marian counter-Reformation - contributed to the shape of domestic politics across the mid-sixteenth century in previously unrecognised ways. By 1562 Elisabeth’s position at the court of Elizabeth I was one of great prominence and she was celebrated as a female courtier until her death in 1565. Elisabeth’s life is here used as a frame through which to view and address key themes including the role of the female courtier at the mid-Tudor

\(^5\) *Books of Hours* were arguably the most common and popular manuscripts of the middle ages. By definition they were Catholic texts and so their popularity waned as the Reformation spread across Europe. Eamon Duffy comments that *Books of Hours* were without question ‘the most intimate and important book of the late Middle Ages, and that intimacy has left its physical trace in the margins, fly-leaves and black spaces of those which survive.’ Duffy, *Marking the Hours*, ix. The presence of the executed Queen, Anne Boleyn’s signature in the *Book of Hours*, along with other significant Tudor figures such as Elizabeth Seymour (sister of Queen Jane and Edward, duke of Somerset, mother of Edward VI) and the fact that the names of Saints such as St. Thomas Becket (feast day celebrated 29 December) highlights that this particular Book continued to be used post-Reformation. Equally, however, the presence of Anne Boleyn’s signature left intact suggests that the manuscript was owned by those who sympathized with her, or had personal reasons for memorializing her, as in both of the other *Books of Hours* that she had inscribed her signature has been wilfully cut off. A detailed analysis of this particular *Book of Hours* revealed that all of the six identifiable inscribers were kin, part of a kinship network that is particularly pertinent to this thesis and will be explored in due course. For more on *Books of Hours* see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers, 1240-1570* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); John Harthan, *Books of Hours and Their Owners* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977) and for more on the *Hever Manuscript Hours* itself see Helen Graham-Matheson, ‘In Kent and Christendom … where I read and rhyme’: Mapping the Religio-political Culture of Aristocratic Kent through the *Hever Manuscript Hours* in *Book Culture in Provincial Society: Authors, Readers and Communities in Kent c. 1400-1700* ed. C. Bartram (London: Ashgate, forthcoming 2015).

\(^6\) The term ‘political’ is here used to denote a much broader sphere of activity than the context in which it is understood today. See discussion on p. 28.
courts and the extent to which women’s court careers were recognised as politically significant by their contemporaries. The following introduction addresses the methodology and scholarly discourses in which this thesis engages, in order to explore and present these ideas and the more discrete interrelated questions that have informed this research.

Recovering Elisabeth - sources and method

The methodology of this thesis combines traditional archival practice with a thorough awareness of current historiographical debates and emergent technologies that aid historical research. It centres on biographical research or life writing as a method of archival scholarship that is, in its written form, an interdisciplinary approach to historiography. This echoes and revisits Lisa Jardine’s methodological position, which she defined as ‘somewhere strategically between history, text criticism and social anthropology’.

A key factor of this approach with reference to the subject matter of this thesis is the centralisation of gender through feminist historiography, which Susan Pedersen defined as having always had a dual mission - on the one hand to recover the lives, experiences, and mentalities of women from the condescension and obscurity in which they have been so unnaturally placed, and on the other to reexamine and rewrite the entire historical narrative to reveal the construction and workings of gender.

This thesis centres around a reconstruction of Elisabeth Parr’s life, and where possible, her experience and motives for action in order to add her to the cannon of

7 Unless otherwise indicated, biographical information is taken from the ODNB where possible; however, given the nature of this research, on historically neglected women from the Tudor courts, many of the people discussed here are not given adequate treatment by this scholarly resource. Elisabeth Parr herself has no ODNB entry, although she is featured in, for example, those of her father, husband and brother. Elisabeth’s sister-in-law Frances Brooke, Lady Cobham, and William Parr’s third wife, Helena both have brief biographical entries. The majority of aristocratic and noblewomen highlighted in this thesis do have biographies in the ODNB, making Elisabeth seem a striking omission. The gender bias of the ODNB that can manifest in the scholarly neglect of women is an acknowledged issue, and one that is being actively addressed. Nevertheless it is important to recognize this issue, and highlight that modern resources and research projects such as the Six Degrees of Francis Bacon project are aware of and taking into account this issue as they proceed with their research. A series of short biographies of key figures in this thesis is Appendix D, 24-31; visualizations of key Cobham-Parr kinship networks are Appendix C, 20-3. For reference, Elisabeth is mentioned in: C. S. Knighton, ‘Brooke, George, ninth Baron Cobham (c.1497–1558)’; Julian Lock, ‘Brooke, William, tenth Baron Cobham (1527-1597)’, and Susan E. James, ‘Parr, William, marquess of Northampton (1513–1571)’, ODNB. See also http://sixdegreesoffrancisbacon.com/post/45833622936/gender-and-name-recognitionand http://sixdegreesoffrancisbacon.com/post/44879380376/an-entry-of-ones-own-or-why-are-there-so-few-women-in for awareness and redress of the ODNB gender bias by Six Degrees of Francis Bacon.


early modern women whose lives and activities have informed the works of Barbara Harris, James Daybell, Lisa Jardine, Natalie Mears, Natalie Zemon Davis and the many other scholars whose work underpins this thesis. Reconstructing the life of Elisabeth Parr specifically, however, raises a number of issues that highlight the challenges facing those who study the lives and legacies of early modern women.

This thesis is built on 110 discrete primary documents that detail Elisabeth’s life and family background, c. 1526-1565. Of the 110, eight documents date from the reign of Henry VIII, 27 from the reign of Edward VI, 15 from the reign of Mary and 60 from the reign of Elizabeth I. This spread of evidence approximately correlates to Elisabeth’s socio-political situation across the reigns of the mid-Tudors, as presented and discussed in the following chapters. Within the framework of the reigns there are periods for which very little source material survives, or none at all. Between January 1548 and March 1550, for example, there is no concrete evidence of Elisabeth, leaving me to infer her whereabouts, and the same is true between July 1555 and April 1557. The reasons for these hiatuses will be explored in due course but in the years 1555 to 1557 the silence does not necessarily indicate inactivity, rather it might indicate a deliberate desire to remain ‘under the radar’ of the Marian regime.

This is in contrast to the calendar year 1562 from which 17 separate pieces of evidence survive attesting to Elisabeth’s prominent and public place within the arena of the Elizabethan court. Elisabeth’s 1562 illness, for example, takes on an even greater significance at this distance than it had contemporaneously because of the proportion of the surviving documents that refer to it. Nevertheless, periods of Elisabeth’s life and relationships for which a body of evidence appears not to survive should not be viewed as insignificant. No correspondence survives between Elisabeth and William Parr or many other people who were definitely significant to her life or career. Elisabeth’s relationship with William shaped her life for more than 20 years, and contributed to the structure of high politics across the mid-Tudor period. A lack of extant evidence does not equate to insignificance or mean that there was not significant correspondence between them or documentation that simply has not survived.

As noted above, this research was inspired by a chance encounter with Elisabeth in a medieval manuscript, an item unique among the rest surveyed and presented within this

---

10 Discussed more fully, pp. 19-33.
11 See Appendix A, 2-5 for a complete list of these documents.
12 Explored more fully in chapters 2 and 4.
13 Appendix A nos. 63-79 and discussion, pp. 68-9, 168.
thesis. Information concerning Elisabeth Parr survives in and has been drawn from a variety of sources, manuscript and print, including household accounts and inventories; literary texts, a portrait and a portrait medal; court and council records and correspondence - personal and diplomatic - although the distinction between the forms is not always easily drawn. The kinds of source material that survive are directly related to the activity in which Elisabeth was involved. As an example, inventories and household accounts survive from 1553/4 because William Parr was attainted for treason against Queen Mary and the Parrs’ property was inventoried and confiscated. Diplomatic correspondence from ambassadors resident at the English and European courts mentions Elisabeth because of her prominence at the courts of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth. Early modern correspondence - diplomatic and personal - has received a great deal of scholarly attention in the last several decades, with studies of women’s correspondence revealing the extent to which women were politically active at the Tudor courts. However, in Elisabeth’s case, although evidence suggests that she was an accomplished correspondent, only three letters written by her and three letters written to her survive, and two of those she received (or a version of at least) survive only in draft form. Of these six letters, two of Elisabeth’s holographs are now in the Loseley Manuscript collection in the Folger Shakespeare Library, the other is in the Elizabethan State Papers, Foreign. Of the three she received, the sent copy of one is in the British Library’s Additional Manuscripts collection as part of the Hardwick papers and the two drafts are in the Elizabethan State Papers, Foreign at The

---

14 James Daybell comments that ‘the permeability of generic boundaries’ does not allow for clear division between different types of correspondence - domestic, familial, state etc. and ‘early modern correspondence was rarely limited to single issues, but covered diverse topics, a characteristic feature that precludes individual epistles from any simplistic or reductive mode of classification.’ James Daybell, The Material Letter in Early Modern England, Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letterwriting, 1512-1635 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21.
15 TNA E154/2/40, Inventory from Westmorland, 1553; TNA E154/2/45, Inventory of the Parrs’ household and belongings taken from Essex, 1553-4; TNA E154/2/39, Fair copy of the Parrs’ household and belongings taken from Essex, 1553-4 and TNA LR2/18, Accounts of the Parrs’ goods, chattels and landholdings confiscated by the crown, 1553-4.
16 See, for example, LP, Henry VIII, 1542, 6, Eustace Chapuys to Charles V, late January 1542 and the correspondence of Ambassador Guzman de Silva and Margaret, duchess of Parma from 1564 discussed in detail in the following chapters.
18 SHC Z/407/Lb.559; Folger Loseley MS, EPMoN to William More, [1551?]; SHC Z/407/Lb.455; Folger Loseley MS, EPMoN to William More, [1551?]; SP 70/38 f. 262 (stamped 219), TC to EPMoN, 26 June 1562; SP 70/40 f. 92 (stamped 84), EPMoN to TC, 7 August 1562; SP 70/40 ff. 215-8 (stamped 190-193), TC to EPMoN, 20 August 1562 and BL Add. MS 35832 ff. 82-4, TC to EPMoN, 14 October 1562.
National Archives, Kew, collected as part of Chaloner’s diplomatic record. Although attempts are made to draw significance for the content and materiality of these letters in subsequent chapters, the limited number and scope of Elisabeth’s surviving correspondence presents challenges for interpretation.

Some challenges to the reconstruction of Elisabeth’s life are common to the study of other early modern women, such as the issue of name changing. Others seem relatively specific to Elisabeth as Elisabeth’s probable birthplace in Kent is a ruin, as are two of her marital homes, Winchester Palace in Southwark and Kendal Castle in Cumbria. The only definitively identified likeness of Elisabeth, a portrait medal struck in 1562, is now inaccessible in private hands.¹⁹ The catalyst for this research was found by accident - Elisabeth’s inscription in the Book of Hours was noted when the manuscript was being analysed as one of three surviving examples of Books of Hours containing inscriptions by Anne Boleyn.²⁰ The Parrs also did not have any children so there is no line of descent that might have led to a surviving archive of material as in the case of their contemporaries the Cecils and the Seymours.²¹ Elisabeth’s relationship with her husband (which spanned the years c. 1543-1565) is a useful example of the imbalance created by a lack of direct source material. Although no more than a glimpse of the relationship between Elisabeth and William Parr survives in material or documentary evidence, almost undoubtedly theirs was a love match. This can be discerned from the degree of difficulty that they experienced in order to be married and remain together across the 22 years of their relationship. Evidence suggests that they spent all possible time together and this might well account for an absence of correspondence, but they were forced to spend periods apart. At these times (such as when William Parr was on embassy in France in 1551 or was in the Tower of London across the winter of 1553-4) there would certainly have been occasions when they would have written to each other, but no letters are extant.²² The only documented evidence of the relationship between the couple is payment for a very generous New Year’s gift from William to his wife in 1553 and Elisabeth’s instruction that her miniature tablet portrait of William be returned to her husband when she died in 1565.²³ Such glimpses

---

¹⁹ The medal is in an undisclosed private collection following its sale by Sotheby’s in 2005.
²⁰ Hever Printed Hours and BL, Kings MS 9, as above.
²¹ The Cecil Papers remain the property of the marquess of Salisbury at Hatfield House, now digitized (http://cecilpapers.chadwyck.com/market.do). The Seymour papers are in the care of the marquess of Bath at Longleat, accessed through microfilm in various locations.
²² See discussion in chapters 2, 3 and 4.
²³ TNA E101/520/9, Money received and desrayed by occasion of the affairs of the Marquiss of Northampton and CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton, 31 March 1565.
surrounded by a lack of primary material can be taken as indicative of the methodological
problems associated with the recovery of women’s lives, discussed in greater depth below.

A key issue in the recovery of early modern women’s lives is the complexity of their
names. Women usually went by at least two surnames during their lives, their name at birth
and their marital surname. In many cases, women in the early modern period married more
than once which further complicates the matter of locating material relating to them, and
this can be further complicated when a woman has a title. \(^{24}\) Elisabeth was born with the
surname Brooke, daughter of George Brooke, Lord Cobham, but the family had a
propensity for using the Barony as a surname and this is a practice I have continued: this
also avoids confusion with her aunt and namesake, Elizabeth Brooke, Lady Wyatt (1503-
1560) who was present at Henry VIII’s court at the same time as Elisabeth, and her niece
and namesake, also Elizabeth Brooke, later Lady Cecil (1562-1597). The confusion between
Elisabeth and her aunt has an impact on Elisabeth’s presentation in contemporary
 scholarship, as it did at the court of Henry VIII. It is unclear when Elisabeth first began
her career at the Henrician court as what may be the first reference to her presence
technically refers to her aunt. Habsburg ambassador, Eustace Chapuys commented on the
ladies from whom Henry VIII was seeking comfort after the execution of Catherine
Howard in 1542 and claimed that ‘she to whom, for the time, he showed most favour and
affection was the sister of lord Coban \([sic]\) and of the wife whom Mr. Huyet \([sic]\) repudiated
for adultery. She is a beautiful girl, with wit enough, if she tried, to do as badly as the
others.’ \(^{25}\) Chapuys appears to be thinking of Elizabeth Brooke, the adulterous lady Wyatt,
but describing a widow of nearly 40 as a beautiful girl (\textit{belle jeune fille} as it appears in the
original) seems a stretch, suggesting that Chapuys was confusing Lady Wyatt with her
niece, known to be at court from the reign of Katherine Parr, c. 1543 but if this
assumption is correct, she was clearly at court by January 1542. \(^{26}\) Works on the Henrician
court have highlighted Chapuys’ remarks and commented on the identity of the lady in
question. Susan Briginde ignores the direct reference to Lady Wyatt, assuming Elisabeth
was the target of Henry’s affections. \(^{27}\) David Mckeen suggests that the girl in question was

\(^{24}\) As suggested above with regard to the Six Degrees of Francis Bacon project, and exemplified by the
correspondence of Bess of Hardwick, bessofhardwick.org, and the work of Alison Wiggins \textit{et al.}\ in the
commentaries to Bess’s letters.

\(^{25}\) LP, \textit{Henry VIII}, 1542, 6, EC to CV, late January 1542. See Appendix B for the original quotation in French.

\(^{26}\) The first unambiguous reference for Elisabeth at court is as part of Katherine Parr’s royal household, 1543-
4, TNA E179/69/41, f. 1, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1543-4.

\(^{27}\) Susan Briginde, \textit{Thomas Wyatt: The Heart’s Forest} (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 9, 548.
another of Elisabeth’s aunts.\textsuperscript{28} Philippa Jones acknowledged the presence of both Elisabeth Cobham and Elizabeth Brooke and asserts that in January 1542 Chapuys was referring to Elizabeth Brooke, but Jones later uses the same incident (from after Catherine Howard’s execution) to assert that Henry VIII showed interest in ‘Anne Bassett, Elizabeth Brooke and Elizabeth Cobham, before finally settling on Catherine Howard, the most unsuitable lady of all.’\textsuperscript{29} No evidence seems extant that supports the assumption that both Brooke and Cobham were objects of Henry VIII’s affection or attention. This incident and the subsequent scholarly confusion is worth stressing because it is a clear illustration of the extent to which references to Elisabeth have been lost or absorbed into the identity of another woman, when, if considered fully, they provide a useful nuance to later events. Because of her ambiguous marital status throughout her life Elisabeth was also confused with William Parr’s first wife, Anne née Bourchier and this has led to erroneous assumptions over Elisabeth’s whereabouts at times and her relative status at the Edwardian and Marian courts.\textsuperscript{30} In one case relating to Elisabeth’s landholdings, her identity was confused with her husband’s because of a mistranscription of court records. William Farrer and John F. Curwen who edited the two volume \textit{Records relating to the Barony of Kendale} illustrate a disagreement over land that Henry Clifford, earl of Cumberland believed to be his property. According to Farrer and Curwen, Clifford’s court rolls for the manor of Grasmere record an inquest featuring ‘Robert Otlay, tenant of the Marquis of Northampton, against pain 5s.’\textsuperscript{31} Scrutiny of the original record reveals that the line does in fact read marchioness of Northampton, and this is a significant piece of evidence for Elisabeth’s landholdings, the significance of which is presented throughout this thesis.\textsuperscript{32}

The ambiguity over Elisabeth’s entry to the court highlights perhaps how minor a figure a new young maid of honour was within the context of the Tudor court, as does, to an extent, the conflation of her identity with William Parr’s first wife. In fact the most significant issue over Elisabeth’s identity occurs when she was at her most prominent as marchioness of Northampton during the reign of Elizabeth. The four incidences of


\textsuperscript{29} Philippa Jones, \textit{The Other Tudors: Henry VIII’s Mistresses and Bastards} (London: New Holland, 2009), 19-20, 274-5.


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Records relating to the Barony of Kendale}, vol. 2, eds. William Farrer and John F. Curwen (London: 1924), 17.

\textsuperscript{32} DLONSL5/2/11/1, Court rolls of Henry Clifford, earl of Cumberland relating to Grasmere, Westmorland, 5 July 1560.
Elisabeth signing her own name all use her title, ‘E Northampton’. All but one are undated but the suggestion is that she was then married to William Parr, which is itself an ambiguous idea as for a considerable portion of her marriage, the legality of the Parrs’ union was in question.33 That Elisabeth identified herself as Parr’s wife and acted as befitting a noble woman - that is she participated in socio-political patronage networks as patron, client and broker with and on behalf of her family and associates - is a key aspect of this thesis, as is the fact that she was recognised as noteworthy and politically significant by her contemporaries.34 A key source of evidence for such ideas are the State Papers accessed initially through the Calendars, and accessible digitally since 2009 as well as in manuscript and microfilm.35 Only three mentions of Elisabeth appear in the index to the Calendars of State Papers, all from 1562 and representing Elisabeth’s correspondence with Thomas Chaloner. Examination of the manuscript correspondence reveals a further seven explicit mentions of Elisabeth from that year alone, but only the term ‘Lady Marques’ is used to refer to her, rather than her full title. The number of references and her contemporary reputation signify that she was so well known that that she was identifiable simply by the epithet ‘Lady Marques’ without the signifier of Northampton but ‘Lady Marques’ was not a term that was identifiable or indexable by the calendar editors or those who encoded the State Papers for digital release, obscuring the extent to which Elisabeth was featured in correspondence in 1562.

The use of Lady Marques as an address for Elisabeth is seen elsewhere, as in a ballad written by William Elderton, entered into the stationer’s register in 1569, and here as well the term has led to misidentification.36 The ballad is entitled A proper new balad in praise of my Lady Marques whose death is bewailed and Hyder E. Rollins describes the ballad as ‘honouring his special patroness, who has been variously identified as the Marchioness of

33 SHC Z/407/Lb.559; Folger Loseley MS, EPMoN to William More, [1551?]; SHC Z/407/Lb.455; Folger Loseley MS, EPMoN to William More, [1551?]; The Hever Manuscript Hours, f. 37v and SP 70/40 f. 92 (stamped 84), EPMoN to TC, 7 August 1562.
34 Nicola Clark’s 2013 thesis on the Howard women during the reign of Henry VIII provides an excellent break down of the kinds of patronage activity noblewomen were expected to engage in at and around a royal court in order to maintain their own and their families’ - natal and marital - positions, and elegantly explicates the varied roles expected of a noblewoman during the early-mid Tudor period. See Nicola Clark, ‘Dynastic Politics: Five Women of the Howard Family During the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509-1547’ (Royal Holloway, University of London: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2013), particularly ‘Patronage’, 40-63 and ‘Female Kinship Networks’, 64-97.
35 Of particular importance to this thesis are the CSP. Span. and CSP. Foreign, Elizabeth, 1558-1589 and The State Papers Online, now http://gale.cengage.co.uk/state-papers-online-15091714.aspx.
36 STC 7562, W. M. Elderton, A proper new balad in praise of my Ladie Marques, Whose death is bewailed, To the tune of a new lusty gallant (London: Thomas Colwell, 1569).
Winchester, the Marchioness of Southampton, and the Marchioness of Dorset. At the
time of writing or printing of the ballad, no such women existed. The marquessate of
Winchester was held until 1571 by William Paulet, but he was a widower from 1558 until
his death. Southampon was an earldom not a marquessate, and the title of countess of
Southampton was held by Mary Wriothesley until her death in 1607. Frances Grey, née
Brandon had been marchioness of Dorset but was promoted to duchess of Suffolk in 1551
and did not use her subsidiary title. She had also died in 1559, therefore both titles were in
abeyance in the 1560s. Reference to the ballad’s text clearly confirms Elisabeth as its
subject, but the date of 1569 (four years after Parr’s death) and the use of ‘Lady Marques’
rather than her full title have led to misidentification of the ballad’s dedicatee. Although
this clearly illustrates Elisabeth’s contemporary reputation and popularity, it has limited
accessibility to sources detailing her activity and has ultimately led to her being less visible
to those investigating the role of women at the mid-Tudor courts, when, as this thesis
demonstrates, her life and activity form a significant case study.

Early modern women

This research is built upon three interrelating bodies of literature: sixteenth century
attitudes to women and gender; scholarship on women and political engagement in the
early modern period and modern scholarship concerned with women and gender in the
period c. 1500-1800. Linking these strands are Joan Kelly’s four criteria for examining
early modern women’s participation in the events and circumstances routinely considered
part of the early modern man’s modus operandi:

(1) the regulation of female sexuality as compared with male sexuality; (2) women’s economic and political roles. i.e., the kind of work they performed as compared with men, and their access to property, political power, and the education or training necessary for work, property, and power; (3) the cultural roles of women in shaping the outlook of their society, and access to the education and/or institutions necessary for this; (4) ideology about women in particular the sex-role system displayed or advocated in the symbolic products of the society, its art, literature, and philosophy.

38 L. L. Ford, ‘Paulet, William, first marquess of Winchester (1474/5-1572)’, ODNB.
39 J. G. Elzinga, ‘Wriothesley, Henry, second earl of Southampton (bap. 1545, d. 1581)’, ODNB.
40 Retha M. Warnicke, ‘Grey, Frances, duchess of Suffolk (1517–1559)’, ODNB.
The nature of the surviving evidence relating to Elisabeth Parr’s economic, political and cultural role as a mid-Tudor female courtier mean Kelly’s second and third criteria are the most relevant to and drive this study, although an understanding of the importance of contemporary gender ideology underpins the readings of the primary evidence.

Contemporary sixteenth century ideology about women requires some contextualisation. In 1558 John Knox famously wrote that ‘a woman promoted to sit in the seat of God, that is, to teach, to judge or to reign above man, is a monster in nature, contumely to God, and a thing most repugnant to his will and ordinance.’ Knox, along with Thomas Becon, Anthony Gilby and Christopher Goodman wrote violently misogynistic diatribes against the two Catholic Queen Marys, Tudor and Stuart. As the Tudor period progressed, however, there was a general evolution in ideas about the capability of the female gender to possess and utilise political and cultural power or significance, that was manifested in the successful Queenship of Elizabeth I, but not exclusively defined by her. In the early to mid-sixteenth century, Knox’s First blast of the trumpet sat in opposition to Elyot’s Defence of good women (1540) although this could be explained by the former’s derision of Queens regnant (Mary Tudor and Mary, Queen of Scots) and the latter’s celebration of a Queen consort (Anne of Cleves, veiling a defence of Catherine of Aragon). The text from which the title of this thesis is taken, David Lyndsay’s 1542 Ane Dialog betwixt Experience and ane Courteour of the Miserabyl Estait of the World aligns itself with Knox’s position. Succeeding Elyot, and opposing Knox and Lyndsay, were Robert Vaughan, A Dyalogue defensive for women against malycious detractoures (1542) and Edward Gosynghill, The Prayse of all women (1542). Book III of Baldassare Castiglione’s Il Libro del Cortegiano, translated by Thomas Hoby, can be read as an additional sixteenth-century querelle des femmes text. Castiglione’s dialogue (via Hoby) claimed

I wonder then, said the L. Gaspar smilinge, sins you give women both letters, and staidness, and noblenesse of courage and temperance, ye will not have them also to bear rule in Cities and to make laws, and to leade armies, and men to stand spinning in ye kitchin. The L. Iulian answered in like maner smiling: Perhappes to, this were not amisse.

It must be said that even the most vociferous defender of women’s right to rule, Thomas Smith, refused to extend his acceptance of women with political authority beyond ‘an
absolute Queene, and absolute Dutches or Countesse’, continuing to ‘reject women, as those whom nature hath made to keepe home and to nourish their familie and children, and not to medle with matters abroade, nor to bear office in a citie or commonwealth no more than children and infants.’ However, the nuances of the sixteenth-century *querelle des femmes* debate have been repressed by an exclusive focus on female rulers. William Thomas’s little-known *An argument, wherin the apparaile of women is both reproved and defended* (1555) is, like Hoby’s *The Courtyer*, centred around the figure of the female courtier, not a Queen regnant, and it is around this personage that the most fruitful study lies.

Defining and positioning the female courtier at the mid-Tudor courts has involved combining a study of original documents with an understanding of existing scholarship on early modern women’s political engagement and women and gender during the period c. 1500-1800. There is a large body of scholarship on early modern women that addresses the social construct of their gender, which has proved useful in defining the scope and boundaries of this study. However, the evidence appertaining to Elisabeth and her colleagues used in this research has suggested the situation for female courtiers across the mid-Tudor courts differs from what has previously been suggested for very specific reasons, therefore minimal references are made to broad studies beyond this introductory chapter.

An inadvertent or at least coincidental but defining factor of this thesis is that the scope or period of time covered also resonates with the discussion of women in Tudor historiography. The time period of c. 1547-1565 that is the focus here is consciously tied to Elisabeth’s life and court career - Elisabeth arrived at court c. 1543, and with the exception

---


of the five year long reign of Mary I, remained there until her death in 1565. Broadly speaking this period (c. 1540-1565) is also often referred to as the mid-Tudor crisis due to the presence of four (arguably five) monarchs within a 25 year period, two reformations and attempts to counter them, two potentially national rebellions (Kett and Wyatt) and the first potential subjection of England to the rule of a foreign king (Phillip II of Spain, I of England) in centuries.47 That the career of a female courtier across this period should be viewed as transitional is clear from the progress of Elisabeth’s role as a female courtier in Henry’s last consort’s household; wife to a member of the protectorate council during the reign of the unmarried minor, Edward VI; unlawful wife and exile during the reign of Mary Tudor, before returning as a premier noblewoman at the court of England’s first unmarried Queen, Elizabeth I. However, little scholarship exists on the role, status and activities of women at court during this period, taking into account the inherent difficulties for some women following the political upheaval that occurred between c. 1540 and 1565 and was enhanced by the accession of Queens regnant Mary and Elizabeth Tudor.48

One of the necessary tasks of the historian of women is to ‘call into question accepted schemes of periodization’, for although all matters that affected men necessarily affected women too, this was not necessarily in the same way - hence gendered inquiries such as those of Joan Kelly.49 As Merry Wiesner asserts, ‘historians of women have demonstrated that there is really no historical change that does not affect the lives of women in some way, though often very differently than it affects the lives of men of the same class or social group.’50 The view of Barbara Harris and other scholars (including Christopher Haigh, John Scarisbrick and Eamon Duffy, although their focuses are not women explicitly) is that history - including women and women’s history - needs to be explored across the ‘great divide’ of the medieval and early modern period.51 Taking this further and in conjunction with David Loades’s conviction that the sixteenth century should be treated as undifferentiated, rather than as a series of individual reigns, there is a convincing case for traversing the natural boundaries created by the reign and new

48 Existing scholarship on the role of women at court across this period includes the thesis of Charlotte Merton that examines women at the courts of Mary and Elizabeth; Anna Whitelock’s separate works on Mary and Elizabeth, Barbara Harris’ work on the earlier Tudor courts and Natalie Mears on Elizabeth’s court. All of these works will be discussed below and in their reign specific contexts over the following four chapters.49 Kelly, 21.
50 Wiesner, Women and Gender, 2-3.
accessions of each monarch within the period 1540 and 1565. Issues of state, church and so on may necessarily cross these boundaries and it cannot be said that women’s experience - certainly that of the reformist/Protestant women who are the focus of this research - remained constant across this period, brief as it was. Whether a period of crisis or otherwise, the years 1547-1558, between the accessions of Edward VI and Elizabeth I, are undeniably transitional and full of mutability, worthy of comparative study, with women’s historiography needing to be considered discretely before being positioned in a complete narrative.

The reigns of Mary and Elizabeth Tudor need to be considered in conjunction because of the Queenly precedents that Mary set for Elizabeth. Similarly, the connection between the courts and reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth should be addressed, although thus far only limited attention has been paid to the extent to which Elizabeth’s court adopted aspects of Edwardian religious and diplomatic practices in a reversal of or in opposition to the counter-Reformation and Catholic agenda of the Marian regime. Presented here is a theory that the political engagement enjoyed and performed by Elizabethan female courtiers was rooted in the unprecedented political context of the Edwardian court.

**The female courtier and court careers in Tudor England**

The aim of this research is to establish Elisabeth Parr as an early modern woman, who, as a female courtier, was recognised as politically engaged and important to the functioning of Tudor court politics. The term ‘female courtier’ has been chosen as distinct from courtier because gender is central to this thesis, as a departure from the more common, generic term ‘lady-in-waiting’ and in preference to the feminised form of courtier, ‘courtesan’, which in modern usage has inherent notes of prostitution. ‘Lady-in-waiting’ is now the accepted term for a woman attendant on the monarch, but the first recorded usage of the term was in 1703, regarding women at the court of the last Stuart

---

52 Loades, *The Mid-Tudor Crisis*, 1, 3 and 5.
54 There is interesting work to be done on the etymology of the word courtesan, touched upon in chapter 3.
monarch, Queen Anne, making it anachronistic for the Tudor courts.\textsuperscript{55} Despite this anachronism, ‘lady-in-waiting’ has been used to encompass the diverse, non-standardised positions for women attendant on a Queen regnant or Queen consort. There were women present at the court of Edward VI but no consort, so the term ‘lady-in-waiting’ would be inaccurate as there was no one for women to wait upon. A more significant issue with the term ‘lady-in-waiting’ is its inherent passivity. The alternative, then, is ‘female courtier’. Courtier, defined as ‘one who frequents the court of a sovereign; an attendant at court’ has been in use since at least the twelfth century.\textsuperscript{56} It is not gendered male, but is rarely applied to women of the court. In her thesis examining ‘images of the courtier in Elizabethan England’ Mary Partridge relates the term equally to both men and women.\textsuperscript{57} A courtier is here defined as any person - male or female - who is present at the court of the monarch. Particular courtiers, dependent on both position and personality, had greater or lesser access to or dealings with the monarch, and, as is explored throughout this study, the structure of Edward, Mary and Elizabeth’s courts developed depending on the gender and marital status of the monarch, which dictated the composition of their attendant household. Elizabeth did not ever have an official attendant position at the courts of Edward, Mary or even Elizabeth, but during the reigns of Edward and Elizabeth she was undeniably resident at court, and participated in the court’s socio-political functions.\textsuperscript{58}

Charlotte Merton’s 1991 thesis on the women who served Queens Mary and Elizabeth provides a guide to the structure of the female royal household and the actual titles given to female attendants at the royal courts, which varied depending on the monarch.\textsuperscript{59} Female attendants of the Tudor Queen consort or Queen regnant were, broadly speaking, divided into the categories of attendant that denoted the level of access that a woman had to the monarch and reflected the women’s daily duties and responsibilities, and any fee or provisions that they received. Lists of female attendants to the Tudor Queens show that categories of attendants remained undefined across the sixteenth century, but some combination of maids of honour, gentlewomen of the privy chamber, ladies of the

\textsuperscript{58} In a manner highlighted by Harris in, for example, Aristocratic Women, 210-1.
\textsuperscript{59} As an example, Merton highlights that during Katherine Parr’s tenure as Queen consort no formal distinction was made between privy chamber and bedchamber staff. It was not until the reign of Mary that the roles were separated on paper, and Merton does not attribute this to the difference between the household of a Queen consort and a Queen regnant. See Merton, ‘The women who served’, 13.

privy chamber and ladies of the bedchamber is typical. Within these categories there were specific roles such as mistress of the maids (held by a mistress Stoner in 1545, for example) and mistress of the robes or wardrobe, as Elisabeth Parr’s sister-in-law, Frances Brooke, Lady Cobham became known from c. 1560. Additional categories of attendants made up the households, from the laundresses and kitchen-maids to gentlewomen of the households, a more casual position with a lesser degree of access to the monarch herself than those of the privy lodgings such as the privy chamber or bedchamber. There were also ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ attendants, denoting women whose attendance at the court was permanent and paid, or otherwise. Not all women at or within the courts can be assigned to one of these official categories so creating a comprehensive picture of all the women at court at any given time is extremely difficult. Merton notes that ‘the varying titles given to the Queens’ staff can be confusing, but it cannot be over-emphasised that it was the woman and not the title which mattered.’ That seasoned residents of the courts conflated the titles is demonstrated by Thomas Hoby - who as the translator of Castiglione’s The Courtier should have known better than most - referring in 1560 to Lady Catherine Grey, Lady Jane Seymour, Lady Mildred Cecil and Mistress Blanche Parry as ‘Queenes maides’. As a number of these women were married Hoby clearly did not mean maids of honour, who were necessarily unmarried. Rather he was designating attendance on, and perhaps intimacy with, the Queen. In 1560 Jane Seymour and Catherine Grey were gentlewomen of the privy chamber, Mildred Cecil was a gentlewoman of the household, and Blanche Parry was a lady of the bedchamber. It is useful to establish the approximate hierarchy for those women attendant at the Tudor courts in order to contextualise the activity of those mentioned throughout this thesis. However, it is crucial to highlight that with the exception of the years 1543-1547 when Elisabeth Parr ( sometime Cobham) was a gentlewoman of Katherine Parr’s privy chamber, Elisabeth does not appear as an official or paid member of the households of Edward, Mary or Elizabeth. This renders problematic any specific term for a female attendant other than a female courtier, and as a result, all analysis of Elisabeth’s activity sits

---

60 A sample of documents listing women attendant on the mid-Tudor Queens include: TNA PRO E179/69/41 for the list of Katherine Parr’s attendants after her marriage to Henry VIII and TNA LC 2/2 for the list of Katherine’s attendants at Henry VIII’s funeral; TNA LC 2/4/2 - the structure of Mary I’s privy chamber at her accession, and TNA LC 2/4/3 - the structure of Elizabeth’s privy chamber upon her accession. All three documents show slightly different categories of female attendants.

61 BL Harley MS 283, f. 176, John Wilkins to George Brooke, Lord Cobham, 30 November 1545; Merton, 13, 44, 169, TNA LC 2/4/3 f. 58 and BL Lansdowne MS 3 f. 88.


63 Hoby, Travails and life, 128; cited by Merton, 9-10. Hoby’s manuscript is BL Egerton MS 2148.

64 Hoby, Travails and life, 128.

65 Elisabeth served as a maid of honour as part of Katherine Parr’s royal household from 1543-1547, as per Appendix A, 3-4, nos. 6-10.
slightly apart from the increasing body of scholarship highlighting the political importance of, for example, the privy chamber under Elizabeth. This thesis aims to highlight that women outside of the inner sanctum that was the privy chamber could still achieve socio-political prominence, significance within patronage networks and most importantly, personal advancement and prosperity as a result of a relationship with and access to the monarch.

Scholars of the English court have clearly established that the court provided employment and opportunity for the advancement of young men, particularly if they could position themselves to attract the personal notice and favour of the King. Those who served the monarch - King or Queen - in their closest official capacity were the members of the privy chamber, and attendant nobles selected for their personal affinity to the King or Queen (regnant or consort). The courtier poets of the Henrician era, Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, and the humanist professional Sir Anthony Denny are examples of men who gained intimacy and influence with the King through friendship and similarities in personality. Charles Brandon was brought up at the court of Henry VII as a show of gratitude for the sacrifice of his father, William Brandon on Bosworth field. A friendship with the young Henry VIII and a brazen charm allowed him the freedom to marry Henry’s sister, the Princess Mary and beget a future Queen of England in his granddaughter, Lady Jane Grey. Brandon’s ennoblement as duke of Suffolk and position as brother-in-law of the King are an unusual example of the possibilities for personal advancement available to a young man who made a career at court. For women, access to the monarch and the resulting intimacy and influence were also political commodities. At the Edwardian court, access to power for the women was through their husbands, who formed the protectorate that surrounded the young King, or through the Lord Protector and his wife.

66 The debate over the relative political significance of the Elizabethan privy chamber was begun by Pam Wright in 1987 and continued by, among others, Natalie Mears, Charlotte Merton and Anna Whitelock as will be presented below and in chapter 5.
68 S. J. Gunn, ‘Brandon, Charles, first duke of Suffolk (c.1484–1545)’, ODNB.
Due to the absence of a queen consort at Edward’s court, Elisabeth did not attend on the monarch in any official capacity, therefore in order to identify her as a female courtier it is necessary to define what is meant by the court and establish the parameters for a female courtier’s career. Definitions of the court vary but essentially start from a basis of the court as the centre of royal power; that is the establishment housing the monarch and their household, from which the central business of the realm was conducted. As with the term ‘courtier’ there is no gender bias to the term or idea of the court itself. David Loades defines the court as ‘the vehicle’ through which the monarch established their maiestas. It was a ‘vast complex and expensive affair’ which was ‘both a stage and a forum; the centre of government, because the king was the centre of government; the machinery through which patronage was sought and dispensed; and a cultural centre reflecting the tastes and ambitions of the ruler.’69 David Starkey asserts that the court was ‘the natural goal for any man of ambition’.70 John Guy’s definition of the court as ‘politically fluid and culturally polycentric’ allows for a dual-gendered approach to court politics in which non office-holding courtiers, male and female, contributed to the political culture surrounding the monarch that was played out across the private and public stages.71 Of particular relevance to this thesis, Natalie Mears suggested that ‘we need to think of the court as a collection of individuals and to use the term “courtiers” more readily than “the court”’.72 Elisabeth Parr only had a permanent residence and recognised position at the court of Elizabeth, but so extensive and fluid was the court as an institution that privileged attendance to the monarch within the fixed structure of the royal household does not prohibit discussion of Elisabeth’s court career.

The identification of Elisabeth’s attendance at and around the mid-Tudor courts as a career is drawn from the work of Barbara Harris, which has been foundational for this study. Harris’s scholarship and methodology have been very influential on the study of early modern women and politics, with Natalie Mears, James Daybell and Amanda Capern among many others citing Harris as a key influence.73 Harris’s most pertinent points in

---

terms of this thesis are ‘the contradiction between aristocratic women’s actual lives and the deeply rooted patriarchal structures that defined their legal rights and material situation’, and that

The responsibilities … women assumed and carried out as wives, mothers, and widows constituted female careers that had as much political and economic as domestic importance and were as crucial to the survival and prosperity of their families and class as the careers of their male kin.74

The contradiction raised by Harris is a discrepancy between the modern sociological understanding of women and gender in early sixteenth-century England and extant evidence and Harris’ argument that aristocratic (and noble) women’s daily lives and agendas ought to be considered as ‘careers’, as is the case with their male counterparts.75 Women’s gender was central to the manner in which they behaved and to their roles as courtiers and equally, women’s roles as female courtiers were integral to the functioning of the court. Harris asserts that the activities of female courtiers ‘constituted careers in the fullest sense of the word’ because ‘their participation and presence were essential for the court to perform its central social, ceremonial, political and diplomatic functions.’76 Harris’s justification for describing and understanding women’s responsibilities as careers is that this practice ‘underscores the full extent and political significance of their contribution to their families, class and society’.77 Here Harris’s definition of ‘career’ is applied to the combined public and private sphere of the court, where the career of the female courtier is far closer to the modern understanding of career as a profession than Harris’ initial usage within the domestic sphere. Harris acknowledges that career is not used here in the sense of a profession or vocation requiring significant training, but aristocratic noblewomen who were successful at court had almost certainly undergone extensive preparation for the role. Elisabeth Parr’s career at the Tudor court is presented here encompassing all facets of behaviour anticipated in the discussion of any male courtier: patronage, petitioning, dynastic politics and diplomacy. Her gender is central, not prohibitive, to the manner in which she carried out these activities.

74 Harris, Aristocratic Women, 5-6.
75 ‘Career’ as used throughout this thesis is defined by the OED as 4. ‘rapid and continuous course of action, uninterrupted procedure’ (Johnson); formerly also, The height, ‘full swing’ of a person’s activity’ and 5.a. ‘a person’s course or progress through life (or a distinct portion of life), esp. when publicly conspicuous, or abounding in remarkable incidents: similarly with reference to a nation, a political party, etc.’ “career, n.”. OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. 7 September 2013 <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/view/Entry/27911?rskey=sksky&result=1&isAdvanced=false>. Neither denotes paid employment as in the modern vernacular, nor is there any connotation of gender.
76 Harris, Aristocratic Women, 211.
77 Ibid. 6.
Barbara Harris’s works address the necessity of women to the functioning of an early modern court; promoting this idea, Charlotte Merton, Dakota Hamilton, Helen Payne, Catherine Howey and Sara Wolfson have all written doctoral theses that explicate the composition and socio-political functioning of royal female households in early modern England. Attention is being paid to the women who made up these households, the courtiers as well as the queens, in order to establish just how women did participate in the socio-political functioning - ceremonial and otherwise - of an early modern court. Commenting on female courtiers at the court of Henry VIII, Nicola Clark claims that ‘it is especially important … for the spotlight to be placed on politically-central families like the Howards … since their position at the heart of government potentially allowed their women to assume considerable political influence with far-reaching implications.' Clark’s kin-centric approach is particularly relevant to this thesis, for although Elisabeth is here presented as a single central case study, the relative circumstances and activities of her male and female kin, and her kinship to significant personages such as Katherine Parr, Anne Boleyn and Elizabeth Tudor were significant factors in determining her activity and its impact.

The significance of female courtiers beyond the English courts has also received scholarly attention in recent years. Svante Norrhem and Peter Lindstrom, for example, have convincingly argued for the varying degrees of women’s political influence and opportunities for engagement at the Swedish and Danish courts highlighting particularly the case of Baroness Dorte Juel, wife of Swedish ambassador, Jens Juel at the itinerant Swedish courts in the 1690s. The 2013 edited collection of essays on *The Politics of the Female Household* presents itself as a ‘master narrative’ of the role of women at the courts of Europe across the early modern period. This volume addresses the women of the Habsburgs imperial courts, c. 1500-1700, Catherine de Medici’s utilization of her ‘flying squadron, and gender dynamics at the Swedish courts, among others. Overall the volume


79 Clark, 13.

80 For the significance of kinship, see discussion on pp. 30-33.


82 Nadine Akkerman and Birgit Houben, ‘Introduction’ to *Politics of Female Households*, 1.

83 Katrin Keller, ‘Ladies-in-Waiting at the Imperial Court of Vienna from 1550 to 1700: Structures, Responsibilities and Career Patters’, 77-98; Vanessa de Cruz Medina, “In service to my Lady, the Empress, as I have done every other day of my life”: Margarita of Cardona, Baroness of Dietrichstein and Lady-in-
concludes that female courtiers were ‘instrumental in creating and enhancing the image of female rulers across Europe’ in the early modern period. ‘By creatively manipulating their gender as a tool for political propaganda’ female courtiers were able ‘to transcend the alleged limitations of their sex’ and in so doing ‘became powerful political players, sometimes individually, but more frequently collectively.’84 My own essay discussed Elisabeth Parr’s agency in Elizabeth Tudor’s marriage negotiations, discussed below in chapter 5 as a key aspect of Elisabeth’s life and activity as an example, rather than the exemplar, of how early modern female courtiers could utilize their gender, their positions within their families and the court and their networks to establish successful and dynamic court careers with recognised political significance.

**Women and politics at the mid-Tudor courts**

Aside from any physical and manual attendance on the monarch, the career of the female courtier encompassed patronage and petitioning activity, which took on varying degrees of political significance depending on the parties involved. With regard to the early modern period ‘politics’ is a broader and more inclusive term than it is used as today. Krista Cowan claims that the act of writing about women and politics ‘challenges the way in which politics is conceived’.85 Citing Hilda Smith, Cowan asserts that early modern aristocratic and noble women ‘were expected to participate in the political obligations of their families’ and this idea informed their activity.86 Many early modern women’s political activity manifested as dynastic political engagement, such as marriage brokering and furthering the careers of their sons, daughters and other relatives; others developed ‘their own objectives’ for political action.87 Both of these kinds of activity are presented within this thesis but key, perhaps, is the extent to which some early modern women were engaged in more traditionally recognised and overt political activity, such as providing counsel to the monarch (particularly pertinent for female courtiers during the reign of a Queen regnant) or engaging in diplomatic activity on behalf of the monarch, whether at their [the monarch’s] request or of their own volition.

87 Nicola Clark’s thesis on the Howard women during the reign of Henry VIII is a recent example of the significance of dynastic politics, as highlighted further below. Mendleson and Crawford, 382.
It has long been acknowledged that there were women with political influence or authority at the court of Henry VIII.\textsuperscript{88} The most noted examples are Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Catherine Howard and Katherine Parr - the four English-born consorts of Henry VIII who served as attendants in either the Queen’s or another royal household before catching the eye of the King and eventually achieving the consort’s throne themselves.\textsuperscript{89} Anne Boleyn served Catherine of Aragon; Jane Seymour served both Catherine and Anne; Catherine Howard served Anne of Cleves; and Katherine Parr was in the household of Henry’s elder daughter, Mary when she came to Henry’s attention. Scholars have long been aware of the agency - both political and religious - of Anne Boleyn and Katherine Parr before and during their Queenships.\textsuperscript{90} Katherine particularly encouraged her attendants to engage in politically and intellectually contentious activity, and it was this environment that was Elisabeth’s introduction to court.\textsuperscript{91} The extent to which Elizabeth I used her attendants as quasi-diplomatic agents in her marriage negotiations has been the subject of scholarly debate for nearly three decades (and will be explored in detail in chapter 5).\textsuperscript{92} Less discussed is the idea that female political engagement and agency was not limited to the isolated case study of Elizabeth’s early marriage negotiations, nor even to the Elizabethan court but instead was a significant feature of women’s activity and authority across the mid-Tudor period, from the first days of the reign of Edward VI. When highlighting the role of women as quasi-diplomatic agents on behalf of Elizabeth I, Mears and Daybell have continued Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge’s attempts to rescue female activity from ‘bedroom tattle’. As Davis and Farge asserted, women’s talk has been characterised as a ‘seeming triviality of spiteful anecdote and bedroom tattle’. Davis contended that ‘although women never actually sat in the sovereign’s privy council they took part in the conversation

\textsuperscript{88} Moving beyond queens consort see Barbara Harris, ‘Women and Politics’, 259-281 and ‘The View from My Lady’s Chamber’, 215-247.


\textsuperscript{91} James, Catherine Parr, 227-49.

\textsuperscript{92} There is a fuller introduction to the scholarly context of women at the Elizabethan court at the beinning of chapter 5.
- political and personal - that filled the halls, chambers and bedrooms of the royal palace.93 Following Davis and Farge’s discussion of the importance of private and personal communications within a wider political context, Daybell confirms that women operated through ‘networks of family and other social contacts, and were often integral to the lubrication of socio-political relations through a range of secondary patronage activities related to sociability.94 This approach supports familial and patronage networks of responsibility as an important motivation for female involvement in politics. Recognition of these motives for and facilitation of action, however, has allowed the dismissal of female political involvement as ‘rather nebulous. … [As] women’s influence it seems is sometimes regarded as intangible, distant from definitions of power as formal and direct, qualities connoted by office.95 The essays in Daybell’s edited volume clearly highlight the fault with this understanding of women’s political activity and confirm the need to evaluate women’s political engagement as a discrete enterprise within the patriarchal structures such as defined by Harris.96

In order that the legitimacy of women’s political agency can continue to be asserted and seen as integral to the functioning of the Tudor courts, the informal talk highlighted above between female courtiers needs to be recognised as political counsel, albeit informal, akin to the political discourse long acknowledged as taking place within the court of Henry VIII.97 The personal nature of the Tudor monarchy so widely accepted with regard to Henry VIII needs to be extended to the reign of his daughter Elizabeth, and the relationship between monarch and attendants viewed as the same, despite the difference in gender. Friendships between women and between women and men had political significance. Just as between the young Henry VIII and his ‘minions’ the intimacy appeared to threaten the legitimate counsel the young King was receiving from his official councillors, so too Elizabeth’s female courtiers - her gossips and confidantes - advised the

95 Ibid.
Queen on matters that conflated the personal and the political, and were accused of subverting official state discourse. Women were involved in the circulation of news as letter writers and recipients, and much of their activity was newsworthy in and of itself. More overt political engagement by women was what Daybell terms ‘quasi-diplomatic agency.’ In a recent essay on women’s political engagement Daybell surveys literature on women’s political activity and highlights many examples of what he describes as ‘women engaged in diplomatic and intelligencing activities, operating through informal and familial channels.’ Daybell asserts that it remains unclear the extent to which these informal and familial networks of political activity intersected with the traditionally male world of official diplomacy and intelligencing, and the nature and degree of female political influence, an idea which is explored in chapter 5. Daybell defines the purpose of his research as ‘to delineate the sorts of roles that women could play in this arena as intermediaries, “information-brokers” and in informal ambassadorial capacities.’ The discussion of Elisabeth’s agency on behalf of Elizabeth I in this thesis (in chapters 2, 4 and 5) performs a similar function.

In the light of acknowledgements that women’s activity can still appear ‘rather nebulous’ there is the question of how to write about and present women’s political activity. Kristin Bundesen claimed that ‘we must disregard the gendered private/public spheres model, especially if writing new socio-political narratives,’ but modes of analysis that centralise gender do serve a significant purpose, especially when the subject matter is politics. Wiesner considered that ‘women’s informal political power has also begun to receive more attention, in a more sophisticated way than the older “power behind the throne” studies of Queens and royal mistresses.’ This is due in part to political historians making distinctions between ‘power - the ability to shape political events - and authority - power which is formally recognised and legitimated.’ Wiesner asserts that the conclusion is that ‘while women rarely had the latter, they did have the former’.

The kind of informal political power highlighted by Wiesner allows for activity including patronage, petitioning, gift giving and epistolary communication of the kind engaged in by male and female courtiers through what Daybell terms ‘informal and familial

98 Explored in chapter 5.
100 Ibid.
102 Wiesner, 289.
channels’ as noted above. Crucial, then, is the power of politically active familial and dynastic networks, in which women have long been able to play a significant role. Understanding Elisabeth Parr’s political significance, therefore, requires a reconsideration of her familial or kinship networks. The court that was the scene of Elisabeth’s career, particularly during the Elizabethan period, was a ‘cousinage’ - Alan Everitt’s phrase emphasising the prevalence of kinship - in the truest sense of the word. Simon Adams, too, commented of the Elizabethan court that ‘they were practically all each others’ cousins in the most literal sense.’ A reconstruction of Elisabeth’s career highlights kinship interplay on several levels, including Elisabeth’s place alongside those such as the Carey family as kin to the Queen and at the centre of a kinship network in which Elisabeth’s own favour and patronage were the goals as well as the means.

Elisabeth’s family was large and enduring, even by sixteenth century standards. She was one of 14 siblings, of whom 10 survived to adulthood, including William Brooke, Lord Cobham (from 1558, later Lord Chamberlain and rumoured model for Shakespeare’s Falstaff); Henry Cobham, resident Elizabethan ambassador to Paris in the 1570s-80s and Thomas Cobham, a notorious rebel and privateer. Her cousin Arthur Brooke - brought up in her household as a brother - was the author of Romeo and Juliet, the model for Shakespeare’s tragedy. Through her marriage to William Parr she was brought into kinship with the royal family through his sister, dowager Queen Katherine and the Herbert earls of Pembroke through Anne née Parr. More distantly through her husband she was also related to the well-known ambassador Nicholas Throckmorton. Most significantly, through mutual Boleyn ancestry Elisabeth was a cousin of Elizabeth Tudor herself (and therefore also a member of the Knollys and Howard families).

---

106 Despite lengthy and informative appendices listing Queen Elizabeth’s kin during her reign, Kristin Bundesen makes no mention of Elisabeth or any of her family, in the context of natal kin. Her portrait of the kinship context of the Elizabethan court is thus incomplete. Scholarship such as Bundesen’s highlights the
of kinship and dynastic politics in the early modern period such as Nicola Clark’s 2013 thesis, kinship relationships were far from clear-cut. Membership of a powerful family could alternate between being a useful and productive means to achieve personal political or material success, to being the catalyst in a dramatic fall from grace. Naturally the nature of the kinship relationships between Elisabeth, her siblings, and other relations such as in-laws and cousins shift across the nearly 20-year period, as does their importance beyond the immediate kinship network. William Parr begins the mid-Tudor period as Princess Elizabeth Tudor’s beloved uncle because of her close relationship to his sister, her stepmother Queen Katherine. By the 1560s the kinship bond between Parr and the Queen was as cousins, as their relationship had been redefined in relation to the woman who then held the most prominent place in Elizabeth’s circle, Parr’s wife and the Queen’s literal cousin, Elisabeth. An examination of kinship bonds and relationships that courtiers invoked across the mid-Tudor period highlights the degree to which kinship manifests and defines friendships and alliances, whether simply genuine or inherently political.

One of the most trenchant points this thesis seeks to communicate is that women were not just important parts of kinship networks and dynastic politics through their marriages - they were players in politics as well as dynasties. That early modern women orchestrated marriages as well as were married is well known in certain cases such as that great Elizabethan dynast, Elizabeth Talbot (1527-1608), countess of Shrewsbury. Less well known is the idea that Elisabeth Parr played a key role in arranging the Whitsun Weddings and positioning Lady Jane Grey to take the English throne, suggesting kinship and a need for historiography factoring in Elisabeth and her family as key connections such as the relationship between Elisabeth Parr and Elizabeth Tudor will not otherwise be given their full significance.

In the case of the Howards, Clark’s thesis highlights the taint of association suffered by the Howard women due to the behaviour exhibited by (or projected onto) their relatives Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard, and how in some cases powerful male and female relatives came to each other’s aid, or strategically disassociated themselves from their relatives to avoid the taint of treason. Clark, ‘Treason: In the Shadow of the Crown’ in ‘Dynastic Politics’, 222-63.

It should be noted that throughout the period discussed in this thesis neither Mary nor Elizabeth Tudor was legally entitled to the rank of ‘Princess’. As he progressed through his first three marriages Henry VIII passed successive Acts of Succession that altered the legal status and legitimacy of his daughters, and affected their rights of inheritance to the English throne. The first Act of Succession, passed in 1534, bastardised Mary as the offspring of Henry’s first, annulled marriage to Catherine of Aragon, placing Henry’s offspring by his second marriage to Anne Boleyn to succeed him on the throne. Following Anne Boleyn’s execution another Act of Succession was passed legitimising Elizabeth in favour of Henry’s future offspring by Jane Seymour. Legally, then, both of Henry’s daughters were known by the courtesy titles ‘the Lady Elizabeth and the Lady Mary’, or ‘My Lady.’ Although the third Act of Succession passed in 1544 returned both women to the line of succession, neither were legitimized. Despite this, throughout this thesis I have chosen to consistently refer to both women as princesses prior to their Queenships for clarity, to avoid confusion with the various other Ladies Elizabeth and Mary who feature in the text. For more on the Henrician Acts of Succession see, for example, Bernard, 70-1; J. D. Mackie, The Earlier Tudors, 1485-1558 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952) 359, 381; Guy, Tudor England, 135-6, 140, 142 and 181.

This idea is also a key facet of Clark’s study, 15-16.
political agenda as the causes of the marriages, not ambition for the throne. Female courtiers with careers - women such as Elisabeth - played an overtly political role in all matters other than official office holding, which needs to be acknowledged in Tudor historiography. Re-establishing Elisabeth’s contemporary political significance highlights the degree to which not only she but also her network of kin and allies need to be reconfigured within the dynastic structure of Tudor politics. David Cressy’s article ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England’ presents a description and analysis of kinship directly applicable to Elisabeth’s kinship interactions and role within a dual-gendered network of kin and allies operating at and around the court across the mid-Tudor period. As Cressy convincingly argues, ‘the English kinship system was egocentric and bilateral, contextual and informal,’ but this informality does not belie the legitimacy of bonds of kinship that require relationships which could manifest as politically significant alliances.

***

Elisabeth Parr née Cobham’s court career began during the reign of Henry VIII, but this analysis deliberately focuses upon the period after Henry’s death in order to elucidate the role of women at the Edwardian court in the light of the lack of a Queen consort, and highlight the development of the role of female courtier under the Queens regnant, Mary and Elizabeth. Although her husband and father were influential, this thesis suggests that Elisabeth Parr’s court career and achievement of political authority were not defined by her relationship with men, rather the greater influences on her life and career were women - beginning with Katherine Parr during her Queen consortship, and Elizabeth Tudor during her reign as well as other female associates and relatives. Elisabeth’s authority and position may have been ultimately due to her relationship with William Parr, but although sometimes she was aided by her marriage to William, at other times she was hindered by their relationship. The context of the Edwardian and Elizabethan courts, too, meant that there was no opportunity for a woman to gain advancement through sexual relations with a monarch (as at the court of Henry VIII), but this did not mean women were without influence at court. Elisabeth did not have a formalised position at the court of Elizabeth Tudor, but she had a longstanding, enduring, and to all evidence genuine, relationship with the Queen that granted her favoured access and influence. During the reigns of Edward and Elizabeth Elisabeth achieved socio-political authority that should be considered alongside existing scholarship on women at the mid-Tudor courts.

110 Cressy, 47.
Aspects of Elisabeth Parr’s documented activity testify that her political authority was recognised by her contemporaries and that her power and political role were more formal than previous scholarship that considers her suggests. This research adds to existing scholarship by presenting a non-royal female subject who was peripheral in that she was not directly engaged in service to the monarch but well placed and opportunistic enough to engineer her circumstances and manifest opportunities for initiative and agency within and beyond a Tudor court context. Using the broad range of sources highlighted above and presenting biographical study as a means of drawing together the discourses of kinship, counsel, patronage, petitioning, textual production and diplomacy, the analysis of Elisabeth Parr’s court career addresses these questions and puts forward a theory of what constituted female political engagement at the mid-Tudor courts. This chapter has provided a brief introduction to Elisabeth Parr as a central case study and drawn together the schools of thought and methodology used to form this thesis. Chapter 2 forms a comprehensive chronological reconstruction of Elisabeth’s life and family background from her birth in 1526 across her court career c. 1543 until her death in 1565 drawn from extant primary evidence. Chapters 3 to 5 analyse the significance of chronological segments of Elisabeth’s career during the reigns of Edward, Mary and Elizabeth respectively. Chapter 3 is a detailed interpretation of the impact of reintegrating Elisabeth into the events and circumstances of the Edwardian protectorate, 1547-1553, highlighting the extent to which female courtiers have been written out of Edwardian historiography with the exception of the Tudor princesses and the rivalry between dowager Queen Katherine Parr and Anne Seymour, duchess of Somerset. This chapter presents theories of Edwardian female courtiers/wives of the protectorate forming satellite and rival court establishments that potentially contributed to the breakdown of Edwardian government c. 1549. Chapter 4 presents Elisabeth’s changed circumstances as a result of the failed attempt to place Jane Grey on the throne in place of Mary Tudor. In promoting the extent to which women suffered alongside and independently of their husbands when their personal political agendas failed, Elisabeth’s behaviour away from the Marian court demonstrates the origins of her quasi-diplomatic agency on behalf of Princess Elizabeth Tudor and the continued importance of female and dual-gendered networks and alliances. Chapter 5 uses Elisabeth’s regained prominence as marchioness of Northampton to extend the existing scholarly discussion of the increased politicisation of the role of female courtier during the reign of an unmarried female monarch. This chapter draws together evidence of Elisabeth’s position within the context of well-known Elizabethan women, the discourse of kinship and previously
unrecognised evidence of the extent to which Elisabeth and other women engaged in quasi-diplomatic agency and counsel for the Queen, confirming the extent to which the role of female courtier had a greater political significance at the Elizabethan court. Chapter 6 forms the conclusion of this thesis, drawing together what the evidence of Elisabeth’s activity across the years c. 1547-1558 demonstrates about the development or progression of the role of female courtier across the mid-Tudor period, and offers thoughts on the reintegration of female courtiers into the historiography of the mid-Tudor courts.
Chapter 2: Elisabeth Parr - a reconstruction

This thesis aims to reposition Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton within the socio-political context of the mid-Tudor courts, and establish her role as an important noblewoman by highlighting how she exercised her power and influence. In order for this discussion to be meaningful it is necessary to establish a chronology of Elisabeth’s life and activity. This chapter follows Elisabeth’s life and career from her birth in 1526 until her death in 1565. It seeks to position Elisabeth within the court environment that she frequented and locate her natal and marital families within the hierarchy of the Tudor gentry and nobility.

The reign of Henry VIII, 1526-1547

Elisabeth Cobham was born on 12 June 1526, the first child of George Brooke and his wife, Anne. At the time of Elisabeth’s birth her father was the heir to the Cobham barony, then held by her grandfather, Thomas Brooke, Lord Cobham. Elisabeth was most likely born at one of the Cobham family’s principal properties, either Cobham Hall or Cooling Castle in Kent, or Lord Cobham’s house in London, Blackfriars. Of the three locations, Cooling Castle on the north Kent coast is the most likely - at least three of Elisabeth’s siblings were born there and Lady Anne maintained a nursery there for roughly 30 years. Little is known about Elisabeth’s parents or her early life. As David McKeen writes ‘too few facts are extant about the young George and Anne to allow anything approaching a reconstruction of their personalities and private lives, and Anne … is especially elusive.’

111 In Robert Glover’s Cobham family genealogy (now CP225/1) Elisabeth’s date of birth is impossibly recorded as ‘Monday, 12 June 1526’ when in fact Tuesday was the 12th. It is possible that Elisabeth’s birth took place on Monday 12 June 1525 but I have followed David McKeen in opting for 1526; McKeen, 7. My naming policy is to follow the most common contemporary convention of referring to the Brooke family as Cobham, their title, rather than Brooke, their surname. Therefore when referring to Elisabeth unmarried she is Elisabeth Cobham, not Elisabeth Brooke. This is also in part to distinguish her from her aunt and niece, both Elizabeth Brookes. Similarly to avoid confusion between generations Elisabeth’s aunts and uncles are given the surname Brooke and her brothers and sisters Cobham. As per convention, the title holder and spouse are referred to as, for example, William Brooke, Lord Cobham to distinguish the barony from a title, such as that held by Lord John Bray, Elisabeth’s uncle. Throughout this thesis Elisabeth Parr’s name is spelt with an s rather than a z. This is because the documents that spell out Elisabeth’s name use this form. It also serves to distinguish Elisabeth from others of the same name referred to throughout this thesis, namely her aunt and niece, and Elizabeth Tudor.

112 It is known that Lady Cobham gave birth to her second son at Cooling, and maintained a children’s nurse at the castle for approximately 30 years - Anne gave birth to her first child in 1526 and her last, the second Edward, in Calais c. 1546. See LP, vol. XVIII, pt. i, 46 and CP 198/110, The Will of Anne Brooke, Lady Cobham, 7 October 1558.

113 McKeen, 6-7.
George, born c. 1496, was the second son of Thomas Brooke, Lord Cobham, and his wife Dorothy née Heydon, through whom George was a second cousin of Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII’s second Queen. It is not possible to ascertain exactly when George became heir to the Cobham barony, but his elder brother, John, and another brother, William both predeceased their father. Of Thomas Brooke, Lord Cobham and his wife, Dorothy’s thirteen children, only George, Thomas and their sisters Elizabeth, Margaret and Faith are recognised in Thomas’s Will of 1529. George’s early career is distinguished by his military prowess, both on the battlefield and in entertainments. He was knighted by Thomas Howard, earl of Surrey on the French battlefields in 1522, and came to the King and Court’s attention as part of the Christmas festivities at Greenwich Palace, in 1524. Of George’s role in the siege of the castle of Loyalty, the chronicler, Edward Hall wrote ‘I thynke that there was neuer a battail of pleasure, better fought then this was.’ George was the consummate Henrician courtier - as handsome and congenial as he was intelligent and martially capable; like the King himself he was comfortable at the council table and in the tiltyard. George’s epitaph on the tomb placed in Cobham church by his son and heir, William, in 1561 proclaims him ‘egregie probatus Cantianis suis inter quo habitavit’ - remarkably well thought of by the Kentishmen among whom he lived - an ideal state of being for a Lord and landholder in the mid-sixteenth century. George passed on his interests in society and politics - and their intertwinement - to his children, especially his eldest daughter, Elisabeth.

Anne was the eldest of the 11 children of Sir Edmund Bray and Jane Halighwell, an heiress of considerable wealth. George was one of 13 children, so Anne and George were continuing the tradition of having a large family. Elisabeth was one of 14 children, at least 10 of whom survived to adulthood. Both George and Anne had positions at the Henrician court that may have paved the way for their children’s careers. George Cobham was a justice of the peace for Kent in the 1530s, and was recognised by Henry VIII for his

114 See Appendix C fig. 1 for the kinship connection between Anne Boleyn and the Cobham family.
115 McKeen, 16; TNA PROB 11/23, f. 24.
116 McKeen, 16; STC 12721, sig. Cxxxiij, Edward Hall, The Vnion of the two noble and illustreate familyes of Lanceastr and York (1548).
118 McKeen, 7-9.
119 In order of birth the Cobham children were: Elisabeth, 1526-1565; William, 1527-1597; Henry, 1529-c.1540; Anne, 1530-c. 1549; George, 1532-c.1570; Thomas, 1533-1578; John, 1534-1594; Edward, 1536-pre. 1551; Henry, 1537- c.1592; Thomas, 1539-post 1571; Edmund, 1540-pre. 1587; Mary, 1542-pre. 1551; Catherine, 1544-post 1571 and Edward, c. 1546-pre. 1587 as they appear in Robert Glover’s notes for a Cobham family tree, now CP 225/1. Of Elisabeth’s siblings, William later Lord Cobham, George and Henry the younger were to play the most significant roles in her life.
services by promotion to the Lord Deputyship of Calais in 1544. In between bearing her 14 children, Anne attended Henry VIII’s second, third and fourth Queens, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour and Anne of Cleves on various ceremonial occasions. A Lady Bray - possibly Anne’s mother, Jane - is recorded as being attendant at the court of Henry VII. This suggests that Anne came from a family of courtiers, and this familiarity with the court and the role of female attendant to the Queen would certainly have paved the way for her to find a place at court for her daughter, Elisabeth, born when Anne was about 20 years old. The lack of extant evidence of Anne’s court career is particularly regrettable, though, as it would be fascinating to be able to connect elements of Elisabeth’s court career and life to her mother’s.

There is very little surviving evidence of Elisabeth Cobham’s youth or introduction to court. Lord and Lady Cobham gave their sons every opportunity to prepare themselves for a career in royal service - formalised, humanist education, European tours, and periods of noble apprenticeships in a variety of beneficial establishments. Elisabeth’s subsequent career suggests that they treated their daughters similarly, offering them all the opportunities for social and intellectual advancement available to women in their time. The Cobhams prioritised learning, both intellectual and practical, understanding that if their children were to make successful court careers they needed the basics of a reformist, humanist education. Knowledge of Elisabeth’s brothers’ education and training for royal service, along with an understanding of the educational opportunities for noble girls in mid-sixteenth century England provides a basis for assumptions regarding Elisabeth’s own preparation for a career at the Tudor courts.

The Cobham sons enjoyed exhibitions at the newly reformed King’s School, Canterbury from 1541, and five of the 10 boys matriculated at Cambridge between 1547 and 1563. One son boarded in the household of Protestant financier and Merchant Adventurer, Stephen Vaughan in 1546 to continue his education; Vaughan

120 Knighton, ‘George Brooke, Lord Cobham’ ODNB; McKeen, 26-8.
121 McKeen, 26. Anne was instructed personally by Henry VIII to attend Anne Boleyn at her coronation and was a member of her privy chamber c. 1533. Lady Cobham also received Anne of Cleves at Dover in 1540, along with her younger sister, Dorothy Bray. See, for example, Lady Cobham’s attendance required for Anne Boleyn’s coronation procession, LP, VI, 181; SP1/55, f. 24, her appointment to receive Anne of Cleves at Dover (with eight attendants) and alongside her husband, and the duke of Suffolk, 1539; BL Arundel MS 97, f. 110, Household expenses of Henry VIII in the year 1540.
122 Lady Bray at the court of Henry VII from John Leland, De Rebus Britannicis, 4:206-6, 245 and 260 cited in Harris, Aristocratic Women, 222.
123 McKeen, 12-3.
was forced to inform Lord Cobham (then resident in Calais) that the tutor he had engaged - a Master Cob - was not living up to expectations.\footnote{BL Harley MS 283, f. 236, Stephen Vaughan to GBLC, 13 June 1546 and f. 240, Stephen Vaughan to GBLC, 22 August 1546.}

George served in the household of John Cheke, the Protestant humanist luminary who tutored, among others, Prince Edward Tudor, William Cecil, and Elisabeth Cobham’s friend and ally, Thomas Chaloner. The Cobhams were distinctly reformist in their learning and associations. Martin Bucer, the influential Lutheran of Strasbourg, wrote to Lord Cobham of his son, John in 1548, praising his ‘ingenium and professu[s] in bonis moribus’.\footnote{BL Harley MS 374, f. 2, Martin Bucer to GBLC, 6 May 1548.} Henry, future ambassador for Elizabeth Tudor, served in the household of the Courtenay earls of Devonshire, descendants of the Plantagenets and heirs to the Tudor throne, during the reign of Mary Tudor.\footnote{McKeen, 13, citing HC to Thomas Wilson, December 1580,  A Collection of Letters, ed. L. Howard (1753), 352-54.} The Cobham family’s reformist/Protestant leanings, as evident in their educational practices and associations, are noteworthy as later they would play a major role in the development of Elisabeth’s court career.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that Elisabeth (and her sisters) enjoyed the same degree of humanist education as her brothers or their learned contemporaries the Cooke sisters, she was certainly literate. Much has been written about the opportunities that humanism allowed for women’s education, with Princess Mary and Margaret More Roper held up as examples from the earlier Tudor years, and the Cooke sisters, Princess Elizabeth and the Seymour sisters representing educational advancement into the latter sixteenth century.\footnote{On educated women of the sixteenth century see, for example, John Guy,  A Daughter’s Love: Thomas and Margaret More (London: Fourth Estate, 2008), 62-5, 141-2 and 266-9; Allen, The Cooke Sisters, 18-55 and Aysha Pollitz, ‘Christian Women or Sovereign Queens? The Schooling of Mary and Elizabeth’, 127-44 in Hunt and Whitelock eds. Tudor Queenship.} Part of the increased attention paid to educating women in Tudor England stemmed from Katherine of Aragon’s requirements that her daughter be educated to rule England as queen regnant as she herself had been educated, and seeking a patron, Juan Luis Vives produced  The Education of a Christian Woman, the most celebrated educational manual for women of the first half of the sixteenth century.\footnote{Juan Luis Vives, De institutione feminae Christianae, Libri primi (Antwerp: Michael Hillen, 1524), translated into English by Richard Hyrde, c. 1528/9. A useful modern edition is The Education of a Christian Woman: a sixteenth century manual; ed. and trans. Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).} Although Elisabeth clearly engaged with literature in some forms and mastered an italic hand - adopted by ‘the daughters of humanists from the 1530s’\footnote{Daybell, The Material Letter, 88.} - and the rudiments of Greek
script, no evidence survives that suggests she aspired to or attained the intellectual achievements of her contemporaries. However, that she found a place in the upper echelons of the intellectual and ambitious mid-Tudor courts, and captivated the fearsomely educated William Parr for more than 20 years suggests that she was comfortable in intellectual and educated circles. William Parr had himself been educated with his sisters, Katherine and Anne, for his formative years, and the most likely scenario seems to be that Elisabeth would have shared her early education with her brothers William, Henry, George and sister, Anne before they embarked on separate paths to their intended court careers.\(^{130}\)

The earliest mention of Elisabeth’s brothers leaving the family home and attending school is in 1541 when William was 13. When her brothers were dispatched to school and Cambridge and afterwards to Europe, Elisabeth likely began her career at the court of Henry VIII, perhaps as a maid of honour although no evidence survives documenting her official position before 1543. Exactly when she arrived is a matter of debate. It could have been as early as 1540 or 1541 if she had served Anne of Cleves or Catherine Howard, Henry VIII’s fourth and fifth Queens. Elisabeth’s mother was among those who welcomed Anne of Cleves upon her arrival in Dover in 1539, and her maternal aunt, Dorothy Bray served as a maid of honour to Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard and Katherine Parr.\(^{131}\) Elisabeth may have been at court during the fall of Catherine Howard, as, at a banquet held to interest Henry VIII in a new wife after Catherine’s execution, it may have been Elisabeth Cobham who caught his attention. The report by Habsburg ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, is ambiguous, however, and might refer to either Elisabeth, or her paternal aunt, Elizabeth Wyatt née Brooke.\(^{132}\) Elisabeth was certainly at court by the time Katherine Parr married Henry VIII as his sixth and last wife and Queen consort of England in July 1543. Elisabeth Cobham appears listed as a gentlewoman of Katherine’s privy chamber across her reign, 1543-1547, although no details of a personal relationship between the women appear extant.\(^{133}\) One thing that is clear, however, is that under the auspices of Katherine’s

\(^{130}\) James, Catherine Parr, 23-36 on the education the young Parr siblings received partly at the hands and certainly at the behest of their mother.

\(^{131}\) As above, notes 121 and 122.

\(^{132}\) See additional discussion in chapter 3; LP, Henry VIII, 1542, 6, EC to CV, late January 1542. See Appendix B for the original quotation in French.

\(^{133}\) Elisabeth Cobham’s position as gentlewoman of the privy chamber to Katherine Parr is evidenced by TNA E179/69/41, f. 1, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1543-4; TNA E179/69/48, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1544-5; TNA E179/69/47, f. 62, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1545-6; TNA E179/69/55, D1, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1545-6; TNA E179/69/44, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1546-7 and TNA LC 2/2 f. 44, Ordinance for the Henry VIII’s funeral, 1547. Sincere thanks to Dr John Guy for drawing some of this material to my attention.
queenship, Elisabeth became involved in a relationship with the Queen’s brother, William Parr, earl of Essex.\textsuperscript{134}

As brother-in-law to Henry VIII, William Parr would have been one of England’s most eligible bachelors, had he been a bachelor. Parr had been married as a child to Anne, daughter and sole heiress of Henry Bourchier, earl of Essex, on the understanding that when Henry died William would inherit the earldom. The marriage was officially solemnised in 1527, but the couple did not cohabit until 1541.\textsuperscript{135} By 1543 Anne had committed adultery and Parr obtained a legal separation from her that allowed him to retain all of Anne’s property, and prevent any of either his lands or her inheritance passing to the children she had borne her lover.\textsuperscript{136} In the early to mid-1540s the issue for Elisabeth, and for her family, was that as long as she was involved with the married William Parr she was prevented from making another marriage, and her reputation might suffer.

After his military success against Scotland in the spring of 1544 George Brooke, Lord Cobham was appointed to the prestigious post of Lord Deputy of Calais.\textsuperscript{137} Lord and Lady Cobham and a number of their children moved to Calais in 1545 while Elisabeth remained at court.\textsuperscript{138} One of the Cobhams’ stewards, John Wilkins, wrote to Elisabeth’s parents in November 1545. He reported that he had seen Elisabeth at court with the other maids of honour, and Mary Tudor and Katherine Brandon, duchess of Suffolk and that, according to Mistress Stoner, the mother of the Queen’s maids, there was nothing in her behaviour that could be disliked.\textsuperscript{139} This comment may refer simply to Elisabeth’s conduct in the role of maid of honour to the Queen, with Wilkins informing Lady Cobham that her daughter was conducting herself appropriately in her service at the court. It might carry an additional note to Lady Cobham, though, designed to reassure her that Elisabeth was not following in the footsteps of her aunt, Anne’s sister, Dorothy Bray, whose 1541 affair with William Parr was cited in the witness testimonies against Catherine Howard at her trial for adultery in 1542.\textsuperscript{140} Howard’s behaviour was suggested to be not as scandalous as Bray’s;

\textsuperscript{134} The Chronicle of King Henry VIII of England being a contemporary record of some of the principal events of the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI written in Spanish by an unknown hand, trans. and ed. Martin A. Sharp Hume, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889) 137-139.
\textsuperscript{135} James, Catherine Parr, 50-2, 82-4; Susan E. James, Kathryn Parr: The Making of a Queen (Aldershot: Aldgate, 1990) 56-60, 96-100
\textsuperscript{136} LP, XVIII, i, 66 and 67; James, Catherine Parr, 83 citing Bodleian Rawlinson MS A.112, ff. 66b-67b;
\textsuperscript{137} McKeen, 10, 28; LP, XVII, 175 and Thynne, Holinshed, 794-5.
\textsuperscript{138} BL Harley MS 283, f. 157, Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk with holograph postscript by KBDuS to GBLC, July 1545; f. 205, Thomas Cranmer to GBLC, 18 April 1546.
\textsuperscript{139} BL Harley MS 283, f. 176, John Wilkins to GBLC, 30 November 1545.
\textsuperscript{140} LP, XVI, I, 1339.
the scale of her sister’s misdemeanours would explain why Lady Cobham would be seriously concerned to hear that William Parr was involved with another lady of her family, especially her teenage daughter. Seemingly intending to avoid scandal and legitimize his relationship with Elisabeth, in the last days of 1546 Parr petitioned Henry VIII for a further legal settlement that would grant him the right to remarry while his first wife still lived.\textsuperscript{141} Unfortunately for the progress of this affair, Henry VIII died on 26 January 1547 leaving matters in the hands of the young new King, Edward VI.

\textbf{The reign of Edward VI, 1547-1553}

Edward VI acceded to the throne of England at nine years old. Mindful of the turbulent regencies of Edward’s youthful predecessors Henry VI and Edward V, both of whom had uncles who took power with varying degrees of failure, Henry VIII had elected a council of 14 of his most trusted advisors and associates to support and guide his son. Henry VIII’s will was a deliberate attempt to guard against factional rivalry within his young son’s kingdom during his minority, to secure a fair and balanced government and advice through a body of his most trusted councillors, with equal rights and authority. Despite this, the council almost immediately promoted Edward Seymour, the elder of the young King’s maternal uncles, to become not regent but Lord Protector of the Realm, aided by Edward’s privy council. In accordance with Henry VIII’s will the late King’s brother-in-law, William Parr, was named an assistant councillor. Following his part in promoting Edward Seymour William became a full member of the privy council and began Edward’s reign with a prominent role at the new court.\textsuperscript{142}

Conversely, with Henry’s death, Elisabeth lost her place at court. With no Queen or other royal woman to attend at Edward’s court Elisabeth was obliged to leave. She remained in the household of Katherine Parr, now dowager Queen, who was no longer entitled to a full royal complement of attendants but retained a household suitable for her status.\textsuperscript{143} When Henry died Katherine had been living at Chelsea Manor, south west London, and this became her principal dower property. Elisabeth had accompanied Katherine to Chelsea as part of her Royal household and remained there for her

\textsuperscript{141} No evidence of Parr’s petition to Henry VIII seems extant but he makes specific mention of having begun proceedings with Henry in his letter to Edward VI, SP 10/2 f. 32 (stamped 106), William Parr, marquess of Northampton to King Edward VI, [March] 1547. A full transcription of this document appears in Appendix B.


\textsuperscript{143} TNA E101/426/2, ff. 1-5, Wage list for Katherine Parr’s dower household, 1547.
widowhood. Meanwhile, William Parr petitioned King Edward to follow the claim he had made to the late King Henry to take action and secure Parr an absolute divorce from Anne Bourchier in order that he might remarry.\footnote{SP 10/2 f. 32 (stamped 106), WPMoN to KE, [March] 1547.} Despite this situation being unprecedented Parr was in a strong position. Because of Parr’s close relationship to Henry VIII as one of his privy councillors and as his brother-in-law, the young King Edward viewed Parr as a kinsman, a kind of uncle. Parr was also a key part of the Protectorate and had been one of the first to be ennobled in the rush of honours led by Edward Seymour, becoming marquess of Northampton in February 1547.\footnote{CPR Edward VI pt. 1 [roll. 799] v. 1 is the charter of creation of William Parr, earl of Essex as marquess of Northampton, 16 February 1547 and CSP Span. 1547-49, 48-51, 7 March 1547.}

In c. March 1547, Parr petitioned Edward VI regarding his desire to be legally separated from his first wife to the degree that he could remarry. Highlighting his ‘weightie cause’ Parr reminded Edward that he had ‘to the grea decaye of his prosporose fortune married to the Ladie Anne Bowsar’, from whom, because of ‘her hainoswe abhomination of frequente and vile adulterie’ he had been permitted by an act of parliament to legally separate.\footnote{SP 10/2 f. 32 (stamped 106), WPMoN to KE, [March] 1547.} The child Anne bore her lover was bastardised, and Parr was left without a wife or heir, but unable to remarry. Parr asserts to Edward that he had sued King Henry, and was promised that the case would be considered by a commission assembled to determine whether he

might without the offence of god for ... the procreation of childerne which he necessarelye requirethe take to his wiffe in the liffe of the said Lady thadventeresse anye other Ladie or gentilwoman unmaried and lefull to take husbande.\footnote{My emphasis.}

As the commission had not been assembled before Henry’s death, Parr wrote to the King, beseeching that he follow up his father’s intentions.

Nowhere in Parr’s letter to the King or in the commissions that Edward issued is there any mention of Elisabeth Cobham, although there can be little doubt that Parr was pursuing a divorce so that he could marry her. Following the necessary principles of securing a legal separation in early modern England, Parr was doing his best to keep the improper behaviour and scandal of adultery attached solely to his first wife.\footnote{Parr had secured divortium a mensa et thoro - separation from bed and board by an ecclesiastical court, without permission to remarry. Lawrence Stone, Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 46-7. According to A. F. Pollard this ‘destroyed the bond of marriage, and many men, having obtained this limited divorce from one woman, had gone through the marriage ceremony with
acted on Parr’s request, and assembled a commission. The commission called on Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury; Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of Durham; Henry Holbeach, Bishop of Rochester; William Maye, doctor of laws and Dean of St. Paul’s, London; Simon Heynes, doctor of theology; Nicholas Ridley, doctor of theology; Thomas Smyth, doctor of laws, and John Joseph, bachelor of theology.

That Elisabeth Cobham was the reason behind Parr’s actions relating to his failed marriage may be verified by a warrant that grants William Parr, marquess of Northampton £113 6s. 8d. licence to grant a vast amount of land and offices in Westmoreland and Yorkshire, including property relating to his family seat at Kendal ‘to the use of the said Marquess and Elizabeth Cobham, daughter of George Brooke, knight, Lord Cobham for term of the life of the said Elizabeth, and after her decease to the use of the said marquess his heirs and assigns.’ Despite the term of reference to Elisabeth by her maiden name - the significance of which will be explored later - it is possible that this warrant marks the date that Elisabeth Cobham and William Parr, marquess of Northampton underwent a form of marriage, pre-empting the decision of the commission. Certainly the warrant and the exchange of land represent a more public, legal recognition of some kind of relationship existing between the pair.

Elisabeth and William Parr were definitely married by the end of January 1548, as on 31 January Parr was called before the privy council to defend his actions. Despite the positive conclusion of the commission investigating Parr’s right to marry, the privy council, led by Edward Seymour, reacted badly. Parr made his case to the council, who then deliberated as to whether Parr and Elisabeth’s actions set a dangerous precedent and, given

---

another’. A. F. Pollard, *England under Protector Somerset An Essay* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co, 1900) citing *APC*, ii. 164, 165. As Anne Laurence suggests, Parr’s common law separation did not grant him permission to remarry and a private Act of Parliament was required before he could legally marry Elisabeth, hence his petition to the young King. Anne Laurence, *Women in England 1500-1700: A Social History* (London: Phoenix, 1996), 141-2. Parr was too impatient, however, and although permission was later granted by King Edward’s commission, the couple had by that time fallen foul of Protector Somerset and been ordered to separate.


150 For an unknown reason, a further patent was issued for the commission to be reassembled in May, with John Redman, doctor of theology replacing Nicholas Ridley.


152 Susan James asserts that ‘risking a charge of bigamy for himself and one of adultery for Elisabeth, Northampton took the matter into his own hands and had a marriage service secretly performed … near the end of the summer of 1547’ and suggests that the ‘evidence of the date of the marriage exists in an enfeoffment of [the] northern estates which Northampton made in Elisabeth’s name.’ James, *Catherine Parr*, 288 and note 3 to p. 288 on 336.
the high status of the persons involved, whether their case would ‘brede manifold disordres and inconveniences within the Realme’. The council then

…ordred and accorded that the said marquis and Mistres Elisabeth shuld from thens forth be sequestred and dwell a part in sort as thone shuld not resort to thother she to remane and seioerne with the Quenes grace untill the cas shuld be at full herd and tried whether the same were consonant with the word of god or no.\footnote{PC2/2 f. 273, Commission to investigate the marriage of William Parr and Elisabeth Cobham, 31 January 1548.}

When the matter of the marriage and the couple’s subsequent separation became known, the Habsburg ambassador to Edward’s court, Van der Delft, informed Charles V of Parr’s actions and the couple’s predicament.\footnote{CSP Span. 1547-1549, 254, VdD to CV, 23 February 1548.} Der Delft was clear that the marriage of Parr and Elisabeth took place before the commission had reached a decision, and that the couple had been aided by his sister and Katherine, duchess of Suffolk. The privy council’s ‘banishment’ of Elisabeth to Chelsea Manor was not a severe punishment, seeming actually to have meant she continued in her existing estate. The council refused to countenance William and Elisabeth’s marriage so she was not allowed to take up a position at court as William’s wife and marchioness of Northampton, but she was maintained in the dignity and situation in which she had spent the last year.\footnote{TNA E101/426/2 ff. 1, 5, Wage list for Katherine Parr’s household as dowager Queen, 1547, Strickland, 81. Strickland records that Katherine’s sister-in-law followed her to Sudeley Castle, and although Strickland suggests this was Anne Bourchier, clearly it was Elisabeth.}

Also resident at Chelsea Manor in addition to Elisabeth and the rest of Katherine’s dower household were Princess Elizabeth and Lady Jane Grey.\footnote{TNA E101/426/2 ff. 1, 5, Wage list for Katherine Parr’s household as dowager Queen, 1547.} Thomas Seymour, married to Katherine Parr since c. May 1547, was known to have intentions towards greater power than he had been allowed by his brother and the council, and it is interesting to wonder what political situation would have developed had Katherine Parr not died as a result of childbirth in September 1548.\footnote{James, \textit{Catherine Parr}, 294, citing College of Arms MS: RR, 21/C, f. 98a.} Following Katherine’s death, Elisabeth probably left Chelsea Manor, not least because of the political situation engendered by Thomas Seymour’s increasingly erratic and unstable behaviour.\footnote{See, for example, James, \textit{Catherine Parr}, 295-9; Loades, \textit{Mid-Tudor Crisis}, 29, Skidmore, 52-3, 100-3 and Guy, \textit{Tudor England}, 200-01.} There is no extant evidence of Elisabeth’s whereabouts between Katherine Parr’s death and March 1550.\footnote{CPR Edward VI pt. 1 [roll 799] vol. 3 [1549-1551]. 6 March 1550, 420.} Where she went next is not known. Her parents were still living in Calais - her father did not relinquish the Lord Deputyship of Calais until 1550 - but her step-grandmother lived at...
Cobham Hall, and her younger siblings were still in a nursery at Cooling Castle so it is possible she returned home to Kent. Another possibility is that Elisabeth accompanied Princess Elizabeth to Cheshunt, the residence of Sir Anthony and Lady Joan Denny when the princess was sent there in the summer of 1548. Anthony Denny was one of Henry VIII’s most trusted advisors, and a member of the Edwardian Protectorate until his death in 1549. Lady Denny was Joan née Champernowne, the sister of Elizabeth Tudor’s close friend and governess, Katherine Ashley née Champernowne; a woman with whom Elisabeth Parr had many dealings during the early years of Elizabeth’s reign. Lady Denny spent time at Elisabeth Parr’s home in 1553, so it is plausible that Elisabeth might have resided with the Lady Denny during her enforced separation from William Parr. It is also possible that Elisabeth maintained a residence on the lands in Westmorland that William Parr had enfeoffed to her in 1547. An inventory from 1553 suggests that the Parrs maintained a residence on the ancestral Parr lands in Kendal. Goods removed from the castle in 1553 included enough household goods and chattels for a fair establishment, and lists of livestock including sheep, cows and a number of horses.

By 6 March 1550 Elisabeth was acknowledged at court as the wife of William Parr, and marchioness of Northampton, as demonstrated by a licence given to Parr ‘and Lady Elizabeth his wife’ along with their guests ‘to eat flesh and milk foods in Lent and other fasts.’ This document is the first that categorically refers to Elisabeth as Parr’s acknowledged wife. By the summer of 1550, Elisabeth’s place and role at the court had been established. Her acknowledged charm and her ease with public and courtly life allowed her to fill the vacancy that had been left by the death of Katherine Parr and the semi-retirement of Anne, duchess of Somerset, after her husband was relieved of his role as protector in a coup led by William Parr and John Dudley in October 1549. Jane Dudley, countess of Warwick was ill-suited and disinclined to occupy the role of leading lady of the court, and so the task appears to have fallen on, and been embraced by, the

---

160 Lord Cobham returned to England and was appointed to the Privy Council in 1550, Meeken, 27, Jordan, Edward VI, 72, LP, vol. XVIII, pt. i, 46 and CP 198/110, The Will of Anne Brooke, Lady Cobham, 7 October 1558.
161 Starkey, Elizabeth, 70.
163 TNA E101/520/9/ ff.7-11.
164 TNA E154/2/40, Inventory from Westmorland, 1553.
166 Skidmore, 210; Guy, Tudor England, 197-9 and Alford, Kingship and Politics, 140.
marchioness.\textsuperscript{167} A dispatch from 17 June 1550 written by Jehan Scheyfve, one of the ambassadors to Charles V, reported a banquet held by the Vidame de Chartres, one of the French ambassadors. The event celebrated the supposed reunion of the duke of Somerset and the earl of Warwick by means of a marriage between Dudley’s son and heir, John, and Seymour’s eldest daughter, Anne. Scheyfve’s dispatch does not mention whether either of the bridal couple’s mothers, the duchess of Northumberland and the duchess of Somerset were present. In contrast, Elisabeth’s presence was marked by her receipt from the Vidame of his especial favour - Scheyfve reports on the extensive conversation that took place between the marchioness and the ambassador - and a very expensive gift.\textsuperscript{168} As William Parr became more prominent within the court and council, his wife’s reputation too became increasingly important. 

William Parr was a significant landowner and he and Elisabeth spent time at their various estates in Kendal and Essex, as above. William Parr was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Surrey in 1552 and the Parrs maintained a residence at Esher Palace in 1551/2 and had property in Guildford, Surrey, where William Parr founded a grammar school in 1553.\textsuperscript{169} In c. 1550/1 Elisabeth wrote two letters to William More, provost marshal of Surrey and deputy to William Parr when the latter was appointed Lord Lieutenant.\textsuperscript{170} The first letter is a request for the loan of £50 from More.\textsuperscript{171} The second letter asks More to grant the rest of his house in Blackfriars to her brother, William Cobham, who was already renting part of it. This letter is the earliest extant example of Elisabeth using her position to petition someone on behalf of others, in this case her brother, William, who also acted as bearer.\textsuperscript{172}

William Cobham, Elisabeth’s eldest brother, had been knighted in 1548.\textsuperscript{173} He and Thomas (the elder) both feature repeatedly in the Parrs’ account book from 1553 as guests and possibly members of the Parr household.\textsuperscript{174} William Cobham was also attendant on Parr

\textsuperscript{167} See, for example, Jane Grey and Steven J. Gunn, ‘A Letter of Jane, Duchess of Northumberland, in 1553’, The English Historical Review, Vol. 114, No. 459 (Nov., 1999), pp. 1267-1271; SP 10/4 f. 60 (stamped 60), JDEoW to WC, 16 July 1548; PROB 11/37/0 f.274 c. 1554/5, Will of JDDuN.

\textsuperscript{168} CSP Span. 1550-1552, 110, JS to CV, 17 June 1550 [original in French and ciphered].

\textsuperscript{169} TNA 6729/10/10, WPMoN to WM, 22 February 1552 (HMC, 607a); LM/COR/3/1, WPMoN to WM, 31 May 1552.

\textsuperscript{170} William More (1520-1600) included in William B. Robison, ‘More, Sir Christopher (b. in or before 1483, d. 1549)’, ODNB.

\textsuperscript{171} SHC S/407/Lb.559; Folger Loseley MS EPMoN to WM, [1551?].

\textsuperscript{172} SHC S/407/Lb.455; Folger Loseley MS, EPMoN to WM, [c.1551?].

\textsuperscript{173} Mekeen, 45-6.

\textsuperscript{174} TNA E101/520/9 ff. 7-11. Cobham also appears on a list of Parr’s gentleman attendants c. 1553/4, TNA E154/2/39.
when in the spring of 1551, he travelled to France on a special embassy, having been given the honour of presenting the French King, Henri II, with the Order of the Garter, in one of the most significant, full scale and impressive diplomatic pilgrimages across the Channel since the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520.\textsuperscript{175}

Parr was accompanied by numerous lords and gentlemen, notably William Thomas and Thomas Hoby, two well-known translators of Italian, who were potentially both involved in Elisabeth Parr’s decision to commission the translation from Italian to English of one of the most famous secular texts of the English renaissance, \textit{The Book of the Courtyer}.\textsuperscript{176} Hoby’s autobiographical account of his activity in the period 1544 to 1554 - known as his \textit{Travails and Life} - is a valuable source for Elisabeth Parr’s activity across the period 1551 to 1552 and gives important context for Elisabeth’s commission. Hoby records entering William Parr’s service ‘upon Newyere’s Daye’ 1551.\textsuperscript{177} This is not Hoby’s first association with William Parr, as in 1550 he had dedicated a translated text known as \textit{The Tragedie of Free Will} to him in what was a transparent plea for patronage.\textsuperscript{178} Parr had already been closely associated with Hoby’s half brother, the well-known Edwardian ambassador, Philip Hoby, who was influential in furthering Thomas’s career.\textsuperscript{179} Shortly after joining Parr’s service, Hoby recounts that ‘upon Teluf Yeven [Parr] had me with him to my Lord Cobham’s house of Cowling Castle, where he disported himself a while.’\textsuperscript{180} Elisabeth would almost certainly have been with her husband and his household as these festivities took place at her childhood home. Between May and August Hoby joined William Parr on embassy to the French court. Upon their return, Hoby recorded several meetings with the marchioness. ‘We that were of [Parr’s] howshold’, writes Hoby, ‘went by water to Gravisend to Assher [Esher], besides Hampton Cowrt, where my Ladye laye all the sommer’.\textsuperscript{181}

Elisabeth Parr made use of Thomas Hoby’s entrance into her husband’s (and arguably her) service by commissioning Hoby to translate Book III of the seminal Renaissance text, Baldassare Castiglione’s \textit{Il Libro del Cortegiano} into English for her. First

\textsuperscript{175} Susan E. James, ‘Parr, William, marquess of Northampton (1513–1571)’, ODNB; Hoby, \textit{Travails and life}, 70–5.

\textsuperscript{176} Balthazar Castiglione, \textit{The Courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio}, trans. by Hoby, Thomas (London, 1561).

\textsuperscript{177} Hoby wrote in the continental European style with New Year beginning on 1 January. In England, the New Year fell on 25 March.

\textsuperscript{178} Travails and Life, 63 and Anne Overell, \textit{Italian Reform and English Reformations, C.1535-c.1585} (London: Ashgate, 2008), 54.

\textsuperscript{179} Gary M. Bell, ‘Hoby, Sir Philip (1504/5–1558)’, ODNB.

\textsuperscript{180} Travails and Life, 65.

\textsuperscript{181} Travails and life 74–75.
appearing in 1528, Castiglione’s text was printed in vernacular French and Spanish versions during the 1530s, but it was not until 1561 that the first vernacular English translation was printed, as Thomas Hoby’s The Book of the Courtier. That Elisabeth did commission the text and initiate the project is beyond doubt. The heading of Book III - the Courtesian - in the 1561 first printed edition, bears the heading

THE THIRDE BOOKE OF  
the Courtier of Count Baldessar Castiglione vnto M Alphonsus Ariosto.  
Englisshed at the request of the Ladye Marquesse of Northampton, in anno.1551

Hoby further confirms her involvement and explains the situation surrounding it in his translator’s epistle to the completed text’s dedicatee, Henry Hastings, earl of Huntington. Initially only Book III was to be published, as Hoby makes clear in his prefatory epistle to the reader in the first printed edition that appeared in 1561. Hoby relates how at first he had not considered translating the text in its entirety, believing that another translator more skilled in the Italian vernacular would be preferred. It was only upon hearing of the death of the other translator - who Mary Partridge has convincingly identified as court clerk, William Thomas - that he began to complete the project, demurring

a great while I forbare and lingered the time to see if anye of a more perfect understanding in the tunge, and better practised in the matter of the woulde take the matter in hande, to do his countrey so great a benefite: and this imagination prevailed in me a long space after my duetie done in translating the thirde booke [that entreateth of a Gentlewoman of the Courte].

Following the marquess’s return from his (mostly) successful embassy in France, he was high in the King’s favour, and still one of the most dominant members of the Dudley presidency. Correspondingly, Elisabeth was one of the most high profile and highest ranking women at the court. It is natural, then, that it was the marquess and marchioness of Northampton who were tasked with leading the welcoming committee and society events organised to welcome Marie de Guise, dowager Queen of Scotland, when she passed through England in 1551. Marie was on her way to take up the regency of Scotland on behalf of her young daughter, Mary, Queen of Scots, who was then residing in Paris with her betrothed, the Dauphin. As Habsburg ambassador, Jehan Scheyfve reported to the Emperor in late October 1551,

182 Hoby, The Courtier, sig. Aaiiiiv. See fig. 4, 86.  
183 Partridge, ‘Thomas Hoby’s English Translation’, 775-779  
184 The Courtier, sig. B. i
It is believed that the Queen Dowager of Scotland has arrived at Portsmouth to avoid your majesty’s ships, and that she will pass through London and visit the King, after which she will go on towards Scotland without delay. The Marquess of Northampton has been chosen to go to meet and welcome her.\footnote{CSP Span. 1550-1552, JS to CV, 26 October 1551.}

The marchioness also played a significant role in receiving and hosting the dowager Queen. In October 1551 the privy council issued

\textit{Lettres to dyvers nobelmen and ladies to attend uppon the Lord Marques of Northampton and the Lady Marques, his wyef, for the receyving of the Quene Dowagier of Scotland at Hampton Courte.}\footnote{APC, Edward VI, October 1551 [397].}

Elisabeth was not the most senior lady able to receive Marie at Hampton Court Palace, but she and her husband were honoured by being specially chosen to do so, likely a reflection of Elisabeth’s favourable position at court.\footnote{CSP Foreign, Edward VI, 477.} The dowager spent nearly a week being lavishly entertained by the English court. Elisabeth Parr is listed as participating in accounts of entertainments and receptions throughout the Dowager Queen’s visit.\footnote{APC, 2 November 1551, 406; Chronicle of Edward, 94; CSP Span., 1550-1552, Advice from JS, 16 November 1551 and APC, f.420, 1551 [397].}

After Marie of Guise departed for Scotland the entire Parr household ‘removed from Assher [Esher] to Winchester Place, in Southwarke, which my Lord Marquess had of Doctor Ponett, then Bishoppe of Wynchester, in exchaungue for an other howse of his in Lambeth. Her laye my Ladie all this winter.’\footnote{Travails and life, 74, 75.} While resident in Southwark Elisabeth gained her first godchild. On 27 December 1551, Lady Elizabeth Cavendish gave birth to a son, William, later duke of Devonshire, and the godparents were Elisabeth, ‘my lady Marquess of Northampton, William Paulet, Earl of Winchester, who was the Lord Treasurer, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke.’\footnote{Arthur C. Collins, \textit{Historical Collections of the Noble Families of Cavendish} (Withers, 1752); Mary S. Lovell, \textit{Bess of Hardwicke: First Lady of Chatsworth 1527-1608} (London: Abacus, 2005), 72.}

In 1551, then, Elisabeth’s social importance at and around the Edwardian court is clear, and well documented, but there is very little extant evidence that documents her movements across 1552. Thomas Hoby suggests that the Parrs moved around their properties together during the spring and early summer of 1552, and in May they resided...
with Lady Elizabeth Browne, another former resident of Chelsea Manor.\footnote{TNA E101/426/2 ff. 1, 5.} Hoby records that following a further sojourn with the Parrs through the winter and spring of 1551/2, on 18 May 1552 he ‘tooke my leave of my Lord and Ladye at Horsleye, where they laye with my Ladie Browne, afterward maried to my Lord Clinton.’\footnote{TNA E101/520/9, Money received and desrayed by occasion of the affairs of the Marquiss of Northampton and CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton, 31 March 1565.} This is the first mention of Lady Browne in connection with Elisabeth Parr. It is significant because Elizabeth Browne, née Fitzgerald and afterward the wife of Edward Clinton, Lord Admiral of England, is one of the women with whom Elisabeth can be most often connected. There are references to her in both the Parrs’ surviving account book from 1553 and Elisabeth’s paraphernalia bequests and list of debts made shortly before her death in 1565.\footnote{TNA E101/520/9, Money received and desrayed by occasion of the affairs of the Marquiss of Northampton and CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton, 31 March 1565.} Hoby had been forced to leave William Parr’s service due to the illness of his half brother, Phillip Hoby. The brothers headed to France so Phillip could undergo treatment, and Hoby confirms that here he began the translation of Book III of *The Courtyer* that was not to appear until 1561, long after Elisabeth had need of its influence. Hoby writes,

> After I had conveyed my stuff to Paris and settled myself there, the first thing I did was to translate into Enlishe the third booke of the ‘Cowrtisan’, which my Ladie Marquess had often willed me to do, and for lacke of time ever differed it.\footnote{Travails and life, 78.}

When the Northampton Divorce Act was passed in 1552, Elisabeth received a highly significant validation of her status. This Act legally allowed the Parrs’ marriage, and was their reward for their continued support of Dudley’s presidency, and for the first time it was legal in England that a man could marry a second wife while the first still lived.\footnote{Pollard, 262; Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 329.} The relationship between Dudley and Parr appears to have been a genuine friendship as well as a politically valuable alliance. Dudley’s correspondence suggests that they were making merry in May 1552 but Parr received news that his father-in-law was ill and travelled to be by his side. It seems likely that Elisabeth would also have visited her father during a serious illness.\footnote{SP 10/14 f.12 (stamped 82), JDDoN to WC, 31 May 1552.} The surviving source material suggests that the year 1552 was relatively quiet for Elisabeth and William, but 1553 was another matter - a climactic year in the history of England, featuring the reigns of three monarchs, and devastating for the Parrs. Elisabeth began the year as a prominent noblewoman, with responsibilities including welcoming the heir to the throne, Princess Mary, to London in February 1553. Henry
Machyn recorded Elisabeth as one of ‘alle the [great] women lades’ who met Mary at the edge of the city and escorted her into the King’s presence.  

Due to the survival of the Parrs’ personal account book for the period 1 February to 3 July 1553 - the month of the death of King Edward VI and the accessions of Queen Jane and Queen Mary - Elisabeth’s activity is unusually visible. The account book allows a detailed reconstruction of the everyday life of a noblewoman during the latter years of Edward’s reign. Across the period Elisabeth spent more than £80 on clothes and apparel and several hundred pounds on jewellery. The Parrs also hired players and singers to entertain them over the New Year. The account book is very revealing of the long-term continuity of the Northamptons’ servants and household members as well as friends and political associates. In this regard it is a particularly useful comparison with the documentation that survives providing extensive detail for the end of Elisabeth’s life, such as her paraphernalia bequests and debts at death, both from 1565. Elisabeth’s brothers, William and Thomas Cobham both appear as members of the Parr household, as does Thomas Middleton, who was still in the Parrs’ service in 1564. Elisabeth’s accounts also reveal some of the gifts she gave across this period, including a gift for an unspecified ambassador at New Year, and a gift of a cup for the christening of a baby as well as a gift of money to the child’s wetnurse, which might suggest she served as godmother.

As well as the expenses incurred keeping the marquess and marchioness attired and entertained, their accounts and expenditure give an indication of those with whom they associated and how they conducted their personal affairs. The interplay of society and politics across the period is clearly visible, as large amounts of money were provided for the marchioness to play at cards and enjoy other entertainments with some of the most significant members of the Northumberland presidency. On the 4th February money was dispersed for ‘my ladie to play at gleke [gleek - a card game] with my lorde deputie of Irelande XLs.’ Later in March, Mistress Newton - one of Elisabeth’s longstanding...

---

197 BL Cotton Vitellius F V, ff. 15-16, Machyn’s diary.
198 TNA E101/520/9 ff. 7-11. See discussion in chapter 3.
199 The detailed make up of Elisabeth’s household is discussed in chapter 3.
201 Thomas Middleton was Parr’s steward in 1553 appearing in both the account book and the list of the household taken after Parr’s attainder for treason. He also accompanied Elisabeth to Antwerp in 1564. TNA E101/520/9; TNA E154/2/45 and CP 3/38, 296, HC to Thomas Middleton, 11 May 1564.
202 TNA E101/520/9, f. 10. Felicity Heal notes that silver, gilt or plate cups such as this were traditionally only given by godparents, supporting this theory. Heal, The Power of Gifts: Gift Exchange in Early Modern England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 64.
attendants - received another forty shillings for the marchioness’ gambling, but most significantly money was given ‘To Mistress Newton the vth of Aprell for my ladie to play at Cardes with my Lorde Robert Dudley and my Lorde Deputie’, and ‘Geven to Master Davie Seymour the xij of Aprell by my ladies comandment [...twentie poundes’. Similarly, included in ‘debtes payd by my lordes comandmengt’ was a payment ‘To my lord of Suffolkes graces the vth of februarie by my lordes comandment for money my lorde borrowed of him X li.’203 Suffolk was Henry Grey, duke of Suffolk and father of Lady Jane Grey; Robert Dudley was the son of the duke of Northumberland the Lord President, and brother-in-law of Lady Jane. He was later a close associate, if perhaps not always an ally, of Elisabeth during the early years of Elizabeth I’s reign. Davie Seymour was kin to Protector Somerset, close enough that through this association he found himself briefly in the Tower following Somerset’s arrest in October 1549. In 1551, however, he was back on duty at Edward’s court, with the Northamptons, who were also his kin. Davie was a cousin of William Parr by way of Davie’s marriage to Mary, granddaughter of William Parr of Horton, Parr of Northampton’s uncle and the man responsible for initiating Parr’s court career by negotiating his entry into the household of Henry Fitzroy, duke of Richmond.204 As remarked upon by David McKeen, ‘a glance at the guests with whom the Parrs played and exchanged entertainers [during this period] suggests that their soirées must often have been but extensions of the political affairs of Whitehall’. Guests such as Croft and Robert Dudley were those with whom ‘the Marchioness most frequently sat down to cards.’205 These socio-political interactions are of course particularly significant given the date of the account book. All of these men were heavily involved in the attempt to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne following the then imminent death of Edward VI.206

A piece of evidence relating to Elisabeth’s activity in the spring of 1553 takes on dramatically increased significance when considered in the light of subsequent events. A warrant dated 24 April 1553 details ‘wedding apparel’ taken from the estate of the deposed duke and duchess of Somerset to be delivered to Jane Grey and Guildford Dudley as bride and groom, their mothers and Elisabeth as ‘the Lady Marques of North.’207 Elisabeth’s inclusion in this elite group - the only non-family member - does suggest some specific involvement in the match. Besides Elisabeth, all other persons mentioned in these warrants

203 TNA E101/520/9 ff. 7-11.
204 James, Catherine Parr, 37-46.
205 McKeen, 56.
206 The significance of the Parrs’ socio-political activity in the spring and summer of 1553 is discussed in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4.
207 BL Royal MS 8 C XXIV, ff. 340v, 363v.
- Jane and Catherine Grey, their parents, the duke and duchess of Suffolk, the Herbergs, the earl and countess of Pembroke, and so on - were members of the bridal party or their nuclear families, but the Parrs were also close kin. Elisabeth’s prominent place amongst the family of the bride and bridegroom is one of the most significant pieces of evidence suggesting that she might have been involved in arranging the marriage between Lady Jane Grey and Guildford Dudley, the young couple who became Queen Jane and her consort upon the death of Edward VI.

**The reign of Queen Jane, 1553**

In May 1553 the Habsburg ambassador, Scheyfve, reported that a rumour or an inaccurate report was being spread that King Edward VI was recovering from his illness to appease the common people.\(^{208}\) Given the nature of Edward’s illness - tuberculosis - it is entirely possible that just two months before the young King’s death his health seemed to be improving and he could have been appearing to recover.\(^{209}\) The reports to which Scheyfve refers might genuinely have been meant to reassure rather than mislead the populace. However, feeling sure that a conspiracy was in process Scheyfve reported to Charles V that amongst other questionable activity,

> the Marquess of Northampton, under colour of going to hunt and of carrying out a bet, has gone to Windsor, one of the principal fortresses in the Kingdom, to set it in order and make it safe. It appears that my Lord Cobham has gone to a place called Romney Marsh, between Dover and Rye. He is to get it provisioned. It is a place of easy access and a convenient spot for landing troops.\(^{210}\)

Edward VI died on 6 July 1553. On 9 July Lady Mary Sidney was sent to visit her sister-in-law, Lady Jane Grey, at Chelsea Manor with what Ives describes as ‘a solemn and mysterious summons from the Privy Council to go that very night to the former protector’s mansion at Syon “to receive that which had been ordered by the King.”’\(^{211}\) On 10 July Jane Grey was brought from Chelsea Manor to the Tower of London and proclaimed Queen. Henry Machyn recorded Jane’s entry into the Tower in his diary, stating that she was accompanied by ‘mony ladies’, almost certainly including Elisabeth Parr.\(^{212}\) She was most likely also one of the ‘ladies and Council’ discussed by the Habsburg ambassadors in their report of the 11th July.\(^{213}\)

---

\(^{208}\) CSP Span. 1553, JS to CV, 12 May 1553.

\(^{209}\) For more on Edward’s final illness see Skidmore, 243-59 and Alford, *Kingship and Politics*, 155-168.

\(^{210}\) CSP Span. 1553, JS to CV, 12 May 1553.

\(^{211}\) Ives, *Lady Jane Grey*, 187; see also De Lisle, 110.

\(^{212}\) BL Cotton MS Vitellius F V, f. 18; Machyn, 95.

\(^{213}\) CSP Domestic Edward VI pt.1, Ambassadors to CV, 11 July 1553 and Advices sent to CV, 20 July 1553.
Queen Jane acceded to the throne based on the Lords Northumberland, Northampton, Dorset and others carrying out Edward's *Device for the Succession* - three successive versions of which survive.²¹⁴ Edward's *Device* contradicted the mandate of his father, Henry VIII, whose 1543 Act of Succession and 1547 will stated that in default of male heirs from Edward, the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth were next in the line of succession. Jane Grey's usurpation of the throne was based on the revised draft of Edward's *Device* written in his own hand, stating that in default of heirs from his own body the crown should pass to Lady Jane and her heirs male. The initial draft of the *Device* had stated simply Lady Jane's *heirs* male, passing over Jane as it did her mother. Edward's holograph revision probably dates from the point at which he knew that he would not live to see Jane Grey bear sons, when the crown's inheritance was an urgent issue. Aware of the contradiction and the potential reprisals, the duke of Northumberland had put in place a plan to apprehend Mary, clearing the field for Queen Jane. Mary had been invited to London shortly before her half brother's death, but she was warned that entering London would put her at the mercy of the duke of Northumberland and those who had rallied behind the claim of her Protestant cousin, and the terms of Edward's *Device*. Instead of London Mary headed to her fortress of Kenninghall, before moving to the even more secure Framlingham in Suffolk. Robert Dudley, Northumberland's son, was initially sent from London with a force designed to trap her. Upon Robert's failure the duke himself rode north to capture Mary as she travelled to claim the throne. Before he reached his destination the tide had already turned and Dudley's intent changed from apprehending Mary to pleading for her mercy. Mary was proclaimed Queen Regnant of England on 10 July 1553. The duke of Northumberland, the marquesses of Northampton and Dorset, earls of Warwick and Arundel and other Lords who had proceeded from the Tower northwards to face Mary in battle instead found themselves under arrest. Those councillors who had remained in London, including the earls of Shrewsbury, Bedford, Pembroke and Arundel, proclaimed Mary Queen on 19 July, as the Lords who had arrived in Cambridge prepared to engage her in battle. By 23 July they were in custody. John Dudley, duke of Northumberland and William Parr, marquess of Northampton were incarcerated in the

---

²¹⁴ See Alford, *Kingship and Politics*, 172. See also David Loades, *The Reign of King Edward VI* (Dorchester: Henry Ling, 1994) and earlier, P. F. Tytler, *England under the Reigns of Edward VI and Mary* (London, 1839). The *Device* itself survives as Inner Temple Library MS Petyt 538, vol. 47, f. 317 written and revised by Edward VI. A further document in the hand of Secretary William Petre is a statement by the privy council that they would uphold the King's *Device* and bears signatures including those of William Parr, George Cobham and William Cecil. This is Inner Temple Library MS Petyt 538, vol. 47 f. 316.
Tower along with many others who had supported Jane Grey. For the senior women of Edward’s court circumstances would radically alter.

**The reign of Mary I, 1553 to 1558**

On 3 August 1553 Mary Tudor entered London at the head of a triumphant retinue and proceeded to the Tower of London, where prisoners of Henry VIII and Edward VI knelt to her to receive their pardons. Among them were Edward Courtenay, soon to be ennobled as earl of Devon, Thomas Howard, the aged duke of Norfolk and Anne Seymour, former duchess of Somerset, who had been held in the Tower since the execution of her husband in 1552. As these prisoners were granted their freedom it was made known that ‘the duke of Northumberland, the marques of Northampton, the earle of Huntingdon, John Gates, and Mr. Palmer, wear alreadie condemned to dye.’ On 18 August 1553 William Parr, earl of Essex and marquess of Northampton was arraigned for treason and sentenced to death. As part of his arraignment, he was stripped of his titles, his office and all his property. Elisabeth Parr had arrived at the Tower of London with the newly proclaimed Queen Jane on 10 July 1553. By the time Mary was proclaimed Queen, Elisabeth had returned to Winchester Palace, the Parrs’ London residence in Southwark. No evidence survives documenting how or when Elisabeth found out that her situation was to change (or had already changed) so dramatically. Perhaps her first notification was the letter she received instructing her to vacate Winchester Palace, as the newly freed and reinstated Stephen Gardiner, bishop of Winchester wanted it back. By 27 July Elisabeth had left the Palace. Where she went next remains unknown.

Between July and October 1553, the Marian regime settled and Elisabeth’s new status and circumstances were clarified. Elisabeth’s situation depended on the treatment William Parr received due to the role he played in the attempted usurpation of Mary’s throne. Following the execution of John Dudley, the Habsburg ambassadors wrote to Charles V concerning Parr’s fate. According to the Ambassadors, the executions of Parr

---

215 The chronicle of Queen Jane and the first two years of Queen Mary, ed. John Gough Nicholls (London: The Camden Society, 1801) 13 and CSP Span., 1553, Ambassadors to CV, 24 July 1553, from London.
216 Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 180-1.
217 The chronicle of Queen Jane, 15-6.
218 Machyn, 95 and de Lisle, 110.
219 ‘The Bishop of Winchester has sent word to the Marquis of Northampton’s wife to quit the lodging given to the Marquis by the late King, which she has done.’ CSP Span., 1553, the Ambassadors to CV, 27 July 1553, from London; ‘the bushope of Winchester hathe his howse againe that the marques of Northampton had’, Chronicle of Queen Jane, 15.
and Dudley’s eldest son the earl of Warwick were deferred while their friends attempted to persuade Mary to pardon them. The Ambassadors considered that the Marquess of Northampton may receive his pardon on condition that he shall take back his first wife and put away the daughter of Lord Cobham, whom he married as his second wife.\(^{220}\)

This rumour - that Queen Mary intended to overturn the verdict of the 1547 commission and the Northampton Divorce Act of 1552, effectively annulling the Parrs’ marriage by reinstating Anne Bourchier as William’s legal wife - came to fruition. On 24 October 1553 Queen Mary officially rescinded the divorce granted to legally separate William Parr from Anne Bourchier by the Act of 1552.\(^{221}\) Thus Elisabeth lost her husband and was legally reduced to Mistress Elisabeth Cobham. Accordingly she lost all the associated status and property that she had built up since her relationship with William Parr had been recognised in the early days of Edward’s reign.

A myriad of documents survive that attest to the radical change in the Parrs’ status following the brief reign of Queen Jane and the accession of Queen Mary. William Parr’s arrest and attainder for treason which led to the forfeiture of all his property to the crown resulted in detailed inventories as the crown surveyed its new assets. These inventories taken by the crown’s agents provide a wealth of detail for a reconstruction of the Parrs’ living situation prior to July 1553. The Parrs kept a considerable number of goods and chattels at Kendal Castle, the Parr family’s ancestral home.\(^{222}\) A book of accounts and inventories testifies to the Parrs having a residence in Essex, where William had lands associated with the earldom of Essex that he had held since 1543.\(^{223}\) He also held lands in Essex that he had claimed from his wife, Lady Anne Bourchier, through his receipt of her father, Henry Bourchier, second earl of Essex’s property as penalty for her adultery, according to the terms of the Henrician settlement, c. 1543.\(^{224}\) Two cartloads of the Parrs’ possessions were taken from their residence, probably the hunting lodge or manor of Estaines [now Easton], near Dunmow, Essex, by a Mr White and delivered to Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon, who purchased a considerable amount of William Parr’s personal belongings. Other items were sold to men such as Thomas Howard, duke of

\(^{220}\) *Chronicle of Queen Jane*, 27 August 1553.

\(^{221}\) Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 303-4; 1. Mar. Session 2, Private Act of Parliament ref. the Marquess of Northampton’s marriage confirmation, repealed, c. 12, 1553.

\(^{222}\) TNA E154/2/40 Inventory from Westmorland, 1553.

\(^{223}\) TNA E154/2/45, Inventory of the Parrs’ household and belongings taken from Essex, 1553-4. TNA E154/2/39, Fair copy of the Parrs’ household and belongings taken from Essex, 1553-4.

\(^{224}\) 1. Mar. Session 2, Private Act of Parliament ref. the Marquess of Northampton’s marriage confirmation, repealed, c. 12, 1553.
Norfolk, also recently released from the Tower, or were given away. The Essex inventory shows that Elisabeth was allowed to retain some chattels, including a feather bed and bedclothes. Additionally, hangings and furnishings were delivered to William Parr - still in the Tower - while the rest were delivered ‘the rest to the handes of William Cobham to the lady Marques use.\textsuperscript{225}

The fair copy of the Essex inventory also reveals that

A Gowne of russet Taphata faced with sables and edged with passementlace of golde; a shorte gown of tuffed velvet single lined \textit{with} bruges saten \[and\] a Gowne of wrught velvet embroidered with a garde of velvet and faced with conie were taken from Elisabeth and ‘delivered to \textit{mistress} Clarencieulx [Susan Clarendius, a long time female courtier of Mary Tudor] to the Queens use’.\textsuperscript{226} There is an extensive record of the personal items given to William Parr for his use while in the Tower, and a record of ‘Apparell of the Lord Marques of Northampton Found in a chest at the Lord Cobhames’ in 1553 suggesting the Parrs’ closeness to Elisabeth’s natal family. It is possible to interpret the Parrs’ parcel of goods at Cooling Castle as an example of their forward planning - the Parrs may have anticipated that they would sometime need to be able to take refuge with Elisabeth’s family, possibly following the coup for Queen Jane and wanted to avoid the confiscation of all of their belongings. The presence of these items in the inventory, however, suggests that this plan did not work.

The Parrs’ Essex household was disbanded upon William’s attainder, and the list of servants, retainers and attendants whose wages were paid, some by the Treasury, is extensive. Ten gentlewomen are listed as attendant on Elisabeth Parr as part of her personal household, and six received payments from the crown for services already rendered.\textsuperscript{227} The crown paid the Parrs’ household £159 3s 4d.\textsuperscript{228} The household of the duke and duchess of Northumberland only cost £135 15s 4d.\textsuperscript{229} Elisabeth lost her financial independence when her landholdings were deemed forfeit to the crown upon William Parr’s attainder. Parr had enfeoffed a portion of his landholdings on Elisabeth Cobham in 1547, prior to their marriage, but when their union was legalised - whether that was in 1548, 1550 or with the Northampton Divorce Act in 1552 - Elisabeth’s land became

\textsuperscript{225} TNA E154/2/45 Inventory of the Parrs’ belongings taken from Essex, 15 August 1553-22 February 1554.
\textsuperscript{226} TNA E154/2/39 f. 40, a fair copy of the Parr’s Essex inventory, as well as the confiscated items of the duke and duchess of Northumberland and others attainted after the Jane Grey coup.
\textsuperscript{227} 10 gentlewomen are listed in TNA 154/2/45 and 6 of these appear again in TNA E154/2/39.
\textsuperscript{228} Payments to the members of the Parrs’ household appear in both TNA E154/2/40.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid.
William’s again and was administered as part of his estate. No record survives of the Parrs’ marriage settlement but it seems a fair assumption that had Parr predeceased Elisabeth she would have kept the lands enfeoffed to her in 1547 as her jointure. As no separate settlement or any kind of private arrangement was in place in 1553, however, Elisabeth’s lands were forfeit. The courts drew up an account of the former marchioness’s land holdings in Essex, Lancashire, York and Westmorland that were ‘ex feoffemente … terra tempore [forisfacta].’ The yearly value of the Parrs’ lands was estimated at £2800.

Once stripped of her own manors and landholdings, in addition to the forfeiture of Parr’s property, Elisabeth would not have had the option of remaining in her own residence, nor was she in a position to lodge at court as part of the royal household or attendant on another great lady. Necessity would have driven her to find refuge, either with her family or with her remaining friends (or allies) such as Jane Dudley, former duchess of Northumberland, who thanks to the generosity of her former friend Queen Mary, maintained a residence at Chelsea Manor, which had become the property of the Dudleys after the death of Katherine Parr. As suggested above, Elisabeth and Jane Dudley were known to be close associates, and Elisabeth also had an affinity with Chelsea Manor. Elisabeth’s accounts for the period March to July 1553 show that a number of prominent women such as Eleanor Manners, countess of Rutland had temporarily lived with Elisabeth, and she might now have visited them, although she would not have been the most welcome houseguest. In 1555 she associated with Lady Elizabeth Cavendish and Lady Catherine Grey, so their homes are possibilities for Elisabeth’s place of residence.

---

230 E101/520/9 highlights rents for property in Stansted and Halstead, Essex that William Parr had enfeoffed to Elisabeth c. 1547 being collected in Parr’s name.
232 This document is SP 12/37 [f. ?] (stamped 143), catalogued within the state papers as with a date of September 1565, but the handwriting and content of the document strongly suggest that it was written at the time of Parr’s attainder when the land was deemed forfeit. That this document and another relating to the state of Elisabeth’s landholdings c. 1558 (discussed below) are preserved with other account documents detailing Elisabeth’s affairs and property at her death would suggest that the legal tangle resulting from the Parrs’ unprecedented marital situation was still being unravelled almost 20 years after the original enfeoffment.
233 TNA LR2/118.
234 Edward VI granted Chelsea Manor to John Dudley in 1550 but the property was confiscated by the Crown when Dudley was attainted in 1553. Early in 1554 Jane successfully petitioned to have the property returned to her and was granted a lease for life. *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 12: Chelsea* ed. Patricia E. C. Cro0tt (London, 2004) 109, citing *Calendar of Patents, 1550-53* 1117 and 127, 1553, 179 and 1553-4, 129.
235 TNA E101/520/9 ff. 7-11.
during this period. The most likely scenario is that Elisabeth returned to her family and lived as befitted a person of her new status. If this is the correct scenario, then it brought her into the midst of one of the key or defining moments of Mary’s reign - the Wyatt Rebellion.

The Wyatt Rebellion took place roughly between mid-January and mid-February 1554 and from the outset involved many of Elisabeth’s family members, both for and against the Queen and her regime. It never posed a serious threat to Mary’s throne, but made it clear that the wave of traditionalist and nationalistic fervour that had helped Mary achieve the throne in opposition to the factional claim of Queen Jane had passed. Rather than the true English princess of 1553, Queen Mary was showing herself to be pro-Spanish to the extent that she appeared willing to subject England to Spanish rule and make it a satellite of the Habsburg Empire. For Wyatt, and for the Cobhams, as for the wider community of participants, the rebellion was not primarily about religious differences between the Queen and her intended husband, and themselves; rather it was about nationalism. They were Englishmen - Men of Kent - and their half-Spanish Queen was inviting a Spanish King to rule her and rule them, and they would not allow it. In January 1554 Thomas Wyatt the younger, son of the celebrated courtier poet and his wife, Elisabeth’s aunt and namesake, Elizabeth Brooke, gathered men at his home, Allington Castle, to discuss how their revolt would proceed. Among those who met were Thomas and George Cobham, Elisabeth’s younger brothers. As Wyatt and his associates spread out across Kent, raising all the men they could, proclamations were read out across the county against them, and the Queen marshalled her forces. These included the commanders of the Queen’s forces, Henry Neville, Lord Abergavenny, Robert Southwell, and Henry Jerningham, the Captain of the Queen’s Guard.

When news of the uprising reached London, William Parr was preventatively detained. Upon his release from the Tower in December 1553, Parr had taken up residence at the house of his aunt by marriage, Elizabeth Warner, wife of the Lieutenant of the

236 Elisabeth and Lady Catherine Grey were the godmothers of Elizabeth Cavendish’s daughter, Elizabeth, born 31 March 1555. William Parr was godfather. Lovell, 92 citing Longleat: Thynne Papers, vol. II, f. 227, William Cavendish to John Thynne, 3 March 1555.
237 For more on the Wyatt rebellion and its significance for Mary’s reign see Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 212-7; Loades, Mid-Tudor Crisis, 36-9; Loades, Intrigue and Treason, 156-9, Loades, Two Tudor Conspiracies (London: 1965) Michael Zell, Early Modern Kent, 1540-1640 (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2000) 34, 219-22 and E. N. Simons, The Queen and the Rebel (London: F. Muller, 1964).
238 Zell, 221.
240 Loades, Intrigue and Treason, 34 citing BL Add. MS 5507 f. 303 (also cited in Arch. Cant., xi (1869) 143.
Tower, Edward Warner and mother of the soon-to-be rebellious Thomas Wyatt (so retrospectively a very odd choice). On the evening of 26 January the Lord Mayor of London, Thomas Whyte and his alderman arrested both Parr and Warner, conveying Parr to the mayoral residence and Warner to Sheriff Hewitt’s residence, before they were incarcerated in the Tower on the morning of the 27th, by direct order of the privy council. While Elisabeth’s husband was not actually involved in the rebellion, he probably supported its aims. Although the involvement of other members of Elisabeth’s family members cannot be doubted, there are question marks over how or to what extent they were involved. Lord Cobham played a complicated, multi-faceted game with Wyatt and the rebels. He appears to have countenanced his sons Thomas and George joining the rebellion from the outset, and his heir, William, departed Cooling Castle with his brothers and the rebels after they had attacked it. Before the attack on the castle, Cobham genuinely seems to have been working in accordance with the Queen’s interests and trying to foil the rebellion. On 30 January 1554, Wyatt and his men besieged Cooling Castle, firing upon the gates and the castle itself when Cobham would not lower the drawbridge and allow them entry. Cobham maintained that three of his sons helped him defend the castle, but some claimed that the whole attack was a pretence to cover Cobham’s alliance with Wyatt. Cobham wrote a lengthy account of the ‘siege’ to the Queen that survives in the state papers.

Despite his best efforts to explain himself and defend his actions, the privy council incarcerated Cobham along with his son- and brother-in-law, and when on 6 February Wyatt entered London the young Cobhams - George, William and Thomas - were with him. During the major battle and march across the city Thomas Cobham, along with a small group of others, became separated from the main force - his actions during this time, which included terrorising the court itself at Whitehall Palace, coupled with his shady reputation, led to his extended incarceration beyond the time of his brothers’ release from the Tower. Commenting on this episode, David Loades asserts that ‘when a contingent of Kentishmen under Thomas Cobham advanced on the court from Westminster, there was panic.’ Thomas was known to be with Wyatt at his surrender, and they were taken together to the Tower by barge. George and William were both apprehended and taken to

241 Chronicle of Queen Jane, 36.
242 For Cobham’s perspective on the events see SP 11/2 f. 48, GBLC to Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, 29 January 1554; SP 11/2 [f. 57] (stamped 52), GBLC to Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, 29 January 1554; SP 11/2 f. 58 (stamped 53), Thomas Wyatt to GBLC, 29 January 1554 [copy in Cobham’s hand] and SP 11/2 f. 59 (stamped 60), GBLC to QM, 20 January 1554.
243 Loades, The Tudor Court, 92.
the Tower to join their father, brother and cousin, brother-in-law and step uncle. On 19 February, shortly after the collapse of the rebellion, William, George and Lord Cobham were put forward for release, along with William Parr and Edward Warner; all were freed on 24 March 1554. William Parr perhaps returned with the family to Cooling Castle, which, though damaged in the rebellion, was not immediately abandoned. Signifying his further involvement in the rebellion Thomas Cobham was arraigned and sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered - the punishment for treasonable offences. Despite this, his release was authorised by the privy council on 24 December 1554 but he remained in the Tower long enough to leave his mark - Thomas Cobham, 1555 is still visible carved into a window frame overlooking Tower Green.

Shortly after his release from the Tower in May 1554 William Parr was restored in blood - though not in honours - and once more able to hold property and titles. The next mention of Elisabeth in the state papers suggests that she too might have been receiving something like an increase in respect, as shown by a warrant from Queen Mary to reimburse Elisabeth, referred to as ‘Marchioness of Northampton’ for a crystal vase decorated with jasper bought by William Parr when on embassy in France in 1551. Despite Elisabeth’s suggested ill-will towards Mary and her regime - her involvement in the brief reign of Queen Jane, her family’s intimate involvement in the Wyatt Rebellion and Mary’s dissolution of her marriage to Parr - three years after Parr’s embassy and almost a year after Mary succeeded to the crown it seems Elisabeth was in a position to receive a small mark of favour and acknowledgement from Mary.

As suggested above, Elisabeth maintained contact with friends and allies from the Edwardian Court, including Lady Jane Dudley, former Duchess of Northumberland, in whose will Elisabeth was remembered in January 1555, and with whom she might have lived at Chelsea Manor after she lost her own property. Jane Dudley is known to have spent some time with her daughter and son-in-law the Sidneys at Penshurst Place in Kent, 25 miles from the Cobhams’ north Kent properties. In March 1555 Elisabeth was associating with more old friends and allies, at what was potentially a very controversial occasion. Lady Elizabeth Cavendish gave birth to a daughter, named Elizabeth, likely after

---

245 SP 11/4 f. 28 (stamped 25), Warrant to pay EPMoN, 25 June 1554.
246 TNA PROB 11/37/0 f. 274, Will of Jane Dudley, duchess of Nort
her godmother, Elisabeth Cobham. The christening of baby Elizabeth Cavendish took place at the house of John Thynne in Brentford. All three godparents were present - Elisabeth Cobham, Lady Catherine Grey and William Parr, formerly marquess of Northampton and of course, Elisabeth’s estranged husband - the earliest extant evidence that the Parrs continued to associate, despite the Marian dissolution of their marriage. In July 1555 Elisabeth was living, or at least visiting her parents, in Kent as a letter written by Edward Courteney, earl of Devon to George Brooke Lord Cobham highlights her presence. Elisabeth’s family had more or less recovered from their involvement in the Wyatt Rebellion. Lord Cobham had not been restored as a privy councillor, but he was increasingly charged with responsibility for crown affairs, including being invited to attend the receptions for Phillip II of Spain and Cardinal Reginald Pole when they arrived in England, c. 1554/5, and more significantly he entertained Cardinal Pole and other important members of the court at Cooling Castle in 1555.

Once Parr had been released from the Tower and restored to some of his estate it can be assumed that he and Elisabeth were living quietly together either in one of Parr’s returned properties, or in one associated with Elisabeth’s family. In the summer of 1557 they were resident in Blackfriars, either in Parr’s property, or the Cobhams’ residence, in the same complex. Whilst there, Elisabeth received a visit from one of the French ambassadors - François de Noailles - who charged her to deliver a message to Princess Elizabeth regarding Philip II’s plot to spirit the princess from England and marry her to Emmanuel Philibert, duke of Savoy, thereby removing her threat to the English throne. The princess returned word that ‘she would rather die than either of these things [the suggested marriage or removal from England] ever come to pass.’ Elisabeth’s activity as intermediary between the French and Princess Elizabeth in the summer of 1557 signals her return to participation in international politics. By the spring of 1558 Elisabeth appears to have felt that her position within the realm was sufficiently strong that she could take steps to reclaim property she believed had been wrongly taken from her in 1553/4 when Parr

248 de Lisle, 172; Lovell, 92.
250 SP 11/5 f. 132 (stamped 36), Edward Courteney, earl of Devon to GBLC, 20 July 1555.
251 PC 2/7 f.189, Meeting at Westminster, 18 November 1554; BL Add. MS 37666, Cobham Chronicles, f. 32.
252 Mckeen, 6; LP, III, ii, 1053; SHC Z/407/Lb.455 and SHC Z/407/Lb.273.
was attainted. Queen Mary wrote to Edward Walgrave on this subject instructing him to ‘compound’ with Elisabeth, and make her a reasonable pension for lands which the state papers show had been ‘dispersed’ by the Queen to other men, once they had (improperly) come into her hands. Elisabeth was given payment in lieu of rents for each of the years of the reign of Mary, and Mary and Philip. Adding to the Parrs’ increased financial stability, on 6 August 1558 William Parr was absolved of all debts to the crown, including those from before his attainder.

Elisabeth’s father, mother and maternal grandmother died within three months of each other in the autumn of 1558, most likely of the influenza epidemic that swept the country. Elisabeth’s parents never saw their daughter reach her final prominence under Elizabeth, but her mother’s will shows her regard for her daughter. Not acknowledging that Elisabeth had suffered any loss of status at all since 1553, Lady Anne Cobham’s will stated that she left her finest jewels and apparel to ‘my daughter the Lady Marquis’.

Anne Brooke, Lady Cobham died on 1 November 1558. Just 16 days after the death of Elisabeth’s mother, Mary Tudor died, and Elizabeth Tudor acceded to the throne.

The reign of Elizabeth I, 1558-1565

Elizabeth Tudor succeeded her sister Mary as Queen regnant of England on 17 November 1558. Within days those members of English society who had withdrawn from court during Mary’s reign had returned and the Elizabethan regime was being established. Elisabeth and William Parr were among the first to take their places at Elizabeth’s court. The Queen herself stopped below the Parrs’ Blackfriars window to inquire after William Parr’s health on her initial entry into London from the Tower. Parr was suffering from an ague and not able to participate in the procession, but the symbolism of the Queen’s action was clear. On the day that Elizabeth Tudor rode into London to take her place as Queen, Elisabeth’s mother was buried beside her late husband in front of the altar in Cobham Church in Kent. In 1561 William Brooke, the new Lord Cobham erected a tomb for his parents, topped with their effigies and surrounded by individually painted
figures of his nine brothers and four sisters, all represented as adults despite some dying in infancy. The individuality of the figures makes it possible that the statuette of Elisabeth is a likeness - one of only three likenesses that survive.261

In the initial establishment of Elizabeth’s government William Parr was restored to the dignity he had enjoyed during the reign of Edward VI; raised again to the estate of marquess of Northampton and reinstated on the privy council on 25 December 1558.262 Elisabeth Parr was reinstated and acknowledged as his legal wife and therefore marchioness of Northampton. The accounts of Elisabeth’s landholdings from the time of her death suggest that the lands restored to the Parrs in 1558 were those forfeited to Queen Mary upon Parr’s attainder for treason in 1553.263 The terms of William Parr’s restoration to his marquessate make it clear that from the beginning of the reign the Queen valued Elisabeth as highly as her husband. Of the £500 per annum of income from land restored to William Parr, it is notable that £200 was designated for Elisabeth’s own use, as it had been ‘in the tyme of Kind Edward’.264

The deaths of Lord and Lady Cobham in the autumn of 1558 meant that all the Cobham siblings began Elizabeth’s reign with increased prominence and visibility, as a network of young and ambitious, and, fundamentally, loyal adherents of the new Queen. George Cobham was appointed a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber in the initial organisation of the new Queen’s court.265 William Brooke, the very new Lord Cobham, was sent by Queen Elizabeth to officially relay the news of Queen Mary’s death to her husband, King Phillip II of Spain.266 In a memorandum on these events, the outgoing (and unpopular) ambassador, the Count de Feria, reported to Philip that William had been sent:

261 See fig. 7, the tomb of Lord and Lady Cobham, in St Mary’s church, Cobham, Kent, 88; BL Add. MS 37666, Cobham Chronicles, ff.34-9.
262 ‘The xxvth of December, 1558. This day the Lord Marques of Northampton was, by the Quenes Majesties commandement declared by Mr. Secretary, sworne one of her hieghnes' Pryvey Counsell.’ APC, 218. As a further mark of favour Parr was appointed High Steward of England by the Star Chamber on 26 April 1559, APC, 275.
263 SP 12/37 [f. ?] (stamped 145), Accounts of Elisabeth Parr’s landholdings at death, Essex, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Westmorland, c. 1565 and SP12/37 f.45 (stamped 143), Accounts of Elisabeth Parr’s landholdings in Essex at her death, c. 1565 - believed to be the original from Autumn 1558.
264 SP 12/2 [f. ?] (stamped 80), Minute for a warrant for WPMoN, January 1559; holograph, William Cecil and SP 12/7 [f. 31] (stamped 46), QE to William Paulet, marquess of Winchester, 1 November 1559; emendations in the hand of William Cecil.
265 BL Lansdowne MS 3, f. 139, Formation of the household of Queen Elizabeth in 1558.
266 BL Cotton MS Caligula E V, f. 56, Memorandum by WC dispatching WBLC to the ‘Kynge of Spayne’, 18 November 1558. For Cobham’s activity on route to and while in Europe see, for example, RP, I, 306-7, CdF to PoS, 25 November 1558; CSP Span. 1558-1567, CdF to Gonzalo Perez, 26 November 1558, SP70/1 f. 34, WBLC to WC, 30 November 1558, SP70/1 f. 78, WBLC to WC, 17 December 1558, SP70/1 f. 81, WBLC to WC, 22 December 1558 and Mekeen, 78-84.
He is the son of the Lord Cobham whom you knew and who recently died. … [Cobham] has no place in the Queen’s household and he and his brother have not enjoyed a good reputation, but have always been adherents of the new Queen and she is attached to him.267

Feria’s later memorandum made reference to Cobham in his capacity as envoy/ambassador, stating that

Cobham has been, and is, so zealous with his letters from Brussels that it has been necessary to manage him a little … The Queen has promised him the wardenship of the Cinque Ports. … The marchioness of Northampton, his sister, who is in high favour with the Queen, has served His Majesty when opportunity has occurred.268

What Elisabeth’s activity on behalf of King Philip was I have not yet been able to ascertain. Feria’s comments here are a useful suggestion of the extent to which the marchioness was recognised as a person of importance and a favourite of the Queen. Elisabeth seems never to have held an official role at the court of Elizabeth I. Her status as a high-ranking noblewoman and friendship with the Queen might reasonably have secured her a formal position as an *Extraordinary Lady of the Privy Chamber* but no records have yet been uncovered that suggest this to have been the case.269 Queen Elizabeth’s attachment to the Cobham family more generally is further illustrated by her visit to the newly ennobled William Brooke, Lord Cobham, Lieutenant of Dover Castle and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.270 Undoubtedly Elisabeth and William Parr would have been members of the party, and it was reputedly during this visit that Elisabeth Parr was the means of marrying her brother to his second wife, Frances Newton, a member of Elizabeth’s privy chamber, and possibly previously one of Elisabeth’s attendants.271 Francis Thynne records the efforts taken to ensure the smoothness of the Queen’s visit to Cobham in his *Chronicle* of the Cobham family, excised from the *Holinshed Chronicle* in 1587.272

267 RP, I, 306-7, CdF to PoS, 25 November 1558. The brother mentioned here is possibly George, the above mentioned member of Elizabeth’s privy chamber who acted against Mary and her pro-Spanish court from his position as clerk to the privy council several years before.

268 CSP Span. 1558-1567, 36, Memorandum by CdF, c. Feb/March 1559.

269 She is not listed among the *extraordinary ladies of the privy chamber* listed in TNA LC 2/4/3.


271 Frances Newton may be the ‘Mistress Newton’ who was a member of Elisabeth’s household c. 1553/4 as in E101/520/9, E154/2/39 and E154/2/45. As sisters-in-law the two women were close and jointly informed the Habsburg ambassador regarding the Queen’s health. Frances née Newton and two of her sisters were recognised in Elisabeth’s paraphernalia bequests at the time of her death in 1565. CSP Span. 1558-1567, 214, BdQ to PoS, 13 September 1561 and CP3/69-71, Inventory and bequests at EP’s death, 31 March 1565.

272 BL Add. MS 37666, f. 39, Francis Thynne’s *Cobham Chronicle*. 
From the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, Elisabeth Parr actively participated in court and other significant events. At the funeral of Frances Brandon, née Grey, duchess of Suffolk in December her young stepmother, Katherine Bertie, dowager duchess of Suffolk - Katherine Brandon had married Richard Bertie in 1553 - was chief mourner with Lady Eleanor Neville, carrying her train. Next came ‘the Lady Marques Northampton’ attended by two women - ahead of Lady Catherine Grey, Frances’ daughter and heiress presumptive to the throne. In the autumn of 1559 Elisabeth was named godmother to the eldest son and heir of Thomas Chamberlain, an up and coming courtier/politician at Elizabeth’s court. According to Henry Machyn,

The xxvij day of October was cristened at sant Benettes at Powles warff ser Thomas Chamburlayn[‘s son], and the chyrche hangyd with cloth of arres, the godfathers names the prync he of Swaythen one and my lord Robart Dudley, and the godmoder was my lade Northamtun.

The Chamberlains’ choice of godparents suggests they were paying close attention to the proceedings at court and aimed to ensure their son’s future by associating him with two of the Queen’s favourites, the marchioness of Northampton and Robert Dudley and her possible future consort. Before her accession Elizabeth had been involved in negotiations for a possible marriage with Erik of Sweden, whose brother, Prince John, was sent to England as special ambassador to continue negotiations and stood as godfather to baby John Chamberlain. Elisabeth’s association with Thomas Chamberlain was just one of those she maintained with prominent Elizabethan ambassadors resident at courts across Europe. Her brother Henry Cobham followed William Brooke, Lord Cobham into diplomacy in 1559, becoming, in 1561, an aide to the resident ambassador in Madrid, Thomas Chaloner, who was a friend and associate of all the Cobham siblings. Likewise, Nicholas Throckmorton, a cousin of William Parr’s and associate of Elisabeth’s from at least her time at Katherine Parr’s residence in Chelsea Manor in 1548, was a correspondent and friend of the marchioness during the early Elizabethan years.

273 SP 12/7 f. 52 (stamped) 92, Funeral arrangements for Frances Grey, duchess of Suffolk, December 1559 [A later draft of this which is SP 12/7 f. 53 (stamped 94) removes various members from the opening procession, including Elisabeth].
274 BL Cotton MS Vitellius F V, f. 114r; Machyn, 216.
276 Chaloner worked and corresponded with WBLC, HC and EP from the earliest days of Elizabeth’s reign. See, for example, Chaloner’s letters to Elisabeth, SP 70/38 f. 269 (stamped 219) and SP 70/40 ff. 215-8 (stamped 190-193); SP70/43 f. 150, TC to HC, 28 October 1562, SP70/44 f. 177, TC to HC, 15 November 1562, SP 70/56 f. 120 (stamped 120), HC to TC, 14 May 1563; SP 70/42 f.205 (stamped 208), TC to WBLC, 14 October 1562.
277 Throckmorton was a cousin of Katherine and William Parr, and a member of Katherine’s household as Dowager Queen which brought him into contact with Elisabeth and William. See discussion in chapters 3 and 5.
Throckmorton wrote to Thomas Chamberlain enclosing letters (now lost) from Elisabeth Parr and her friend Elizabeth Clinton requesting goods to be delivered to them at court. Throckmorton wryly remarked to Chamberlain

Youe shall receive herewith a lettre from my lady Marquess of northampton, for the provision of some thinges there for her, wherein I perceive your iudgement is allowed in the forniture of thinges mete for Laydies, wherein I pray god send youe better sucesse then I had of late, but both your skill is better than myne and youe are farther of, and farre fetched and dere bought is good for ladyes.  

As godmother to his son and heir, Elisabeth had an obvious connection to Chamberlain and the right to claim his favour.

From 1559 Nicholas Throckmorton had been unhappily stationed in Paris as resident ambassador to the French court, and the Throckmortons employed a variety of strategies to petition the Queen to allow Nicholas home. Three letters sent from Anne Throckmorton to her husband across the years 1561-62 suggest that one of Lady Throckmorton’s tactics was to use Elisabeth Parr as a means of influencing the Queen, prevailing on the intimacy of the women’s friendship. Henry Killigrew, a member of the young network of diplomatic agents rising to favour and prominence at the early Elizabethan court, wrote to Throckmorton in Paris appraising him of the current state of his case, remarking that after Lady Anne ‘had received the Queen’s answer by the Marchioness, [he] wrote unto the Lord Keeper, of whom he received yesterday the like answer, that it cannot be as yet. All such as profess themselves to be [your] friends say that there is but a woman only who is the cause of [your] stay.’ The probable candidate for the woman in question is Mary Stuart, the most significant rival claimant to Elizabeth’s throne. After a brief stint in Paris in 1561 where she made the acquaintance of Mary, Queen of Scots, and dowager Queen consort of France through her marriage to the short-lived Francis II, Lady Throckmorton returned to the English court in 1562, and her letters to her husband are revealing both of the difficulties she faced due to his lengthy absence and her use of Elisabeth Parr as a means of reaching out to the Queen. In the summer of

---

278 SP 70/19 ff. 206-7 (stamped 132-133), NT to TCham, 29 October 1560.
279 SP 70/39 ff. 21-22, AT to NT, 10 July 1562; SP 70/41 f.184 (stamped 178), AT to NT, 20 September 1562 and SP70/51 f. 108 (stamped 107), AT to NT, 24 Feb. 1563.
280 SP 70/19 f. 94 (stamped 46), Henry Killigrew to NT, 15 October 1560.
281 See, for example, SP12/17 ff. (stamped 95), Thomas Windebank to WC, 28 June 1561 and SP12/19 ff. (stamped 100), Thomas Windebank to WC, 9 September 1561 for AT at the French court, and letters from Mary herself and her attendant regarding the continuing relationship between MQoS and AT upon Mary’s return to Scotland - SP70/30 f. 39 (stamped 30), MQoS to AT, 12 August 1561 and SP52/8 f. 88, Marie de Bethune to AT, 30 June 1563.
1562, Queen Elizabeth had intended a progress to the north of England and orchestrated a meeting with Mary, Queen of Scots who had recently returned from France. Anne Throckmorton wrote to her husband that the Queen was committed to the Northern progress and that she and Elisabeth had done all they could to convince the Queen that Anne should not be made to go with the court.\textsuperscript{282} Unfortunately in this matter, as in the matter of Throckmorton’s recall, Elisabeth was unsuccessful.

When early in September 1561 the Queen was taken very ill with dropsy and appeared near death, Bishop Aquila de Quadra received his information from the marchioness of Northampton, who, he reported, ‘is in a better position to judge than anyone else [and] is very intimate with the Swedish ambassador and has received very valuable presents from him.’\textsuperscript{283} De Quadra confirmed that two of the Queen’s intimates - Elisabeth Parr and her sister-in-law, Frances Brooke, Lady Cobham - considered her life to be in danger and asserted ‘if they are mistaken, I am mistaken also.’ Elisabeth’s intimacy with the Queen extended beyond political conversation. A list of ‘Dettes dew by the Quenes Majestie’ in the hand of William Cecil shows that Elizabeth owed ‘to the Lady Marques’ three angels in January 1562. Interestingly, Elisabeth is the only individual on this list of debts, which is otherwise composed of household stuffs and tradesmen.\textsuperscript{284} Possibly this is a gambling debt - both women were fond of cards.\textsuperscript{285} Elisabeth is also evident in other financial documents from the period 1561/2, as Elisabeth and William were jointly granted a licence for 20 li in 1561 to alienate various properties ‘to George Bowes, knight, and Robert Bowes and the heirs and assigns of George.’\textsuperscript{286}

Elisabeth’s wider reputation as a prominent noblewoman of the Elizabethan court was cemented when Thomas Hoby finally succeeded in seeing his \textit{The Book of the Courtyer} into print, having begun the translation at Elisabeth’s behest in 1551/2.\textsuperscript{287} During the English Court’s negotiations over a possible marriage between Queen Elizabeth and King Erik XIV of Sweden, it was reputedly suggested to the Swedish ambassador that the King ought to read ‘a little book called the Cowrtisan’, and Erik was duly presented with ‘a little gilt book called the Cowrtisan’, although this seems to have been in French, rather than

\textsuperscript{282} SP 70/39 [f. ?] (stamped 21-22), AT to NT, 10 July 1562.
\textsuperscript{283} CSP Span. 1558-1567, 214, BdQ to PoS, 13 September 1561.
\textsuperscript{284} BL Lansdowne MS 104, f. 7, Dettes Dew by the Q\textit{uennes Majestie}, 20 January 1562.
\textsuperscript{285} Wiesner, 165; TNA E101/520/9, \textit{Money received and desrayed by occasion of the affairs of the Marquiss of Northampton}.
\textsuperscript{286} CPR 3 Elizabeth Pt. II, 973, 172, 17 September 1561.
\textsuperscript{287} \textit{Travails and life}, 74-5 and 77-8, and Hoby, \textit{The Courtyer}, sig. B i.
Hoby’s English translation. While Hoby’s *The Courtier* immortalised Elisabeth’s image in words, a portrait medal by the celebrated portraitist Steven van Herwijck did so in silver. Van Herwijck travelled to the English Court from his native Holland in 1562, having previously worked in Utrecht and Amsterdam. He struck a set of what are believed to be the first portrait medals of private individuals in England, which included Elisabeth and William Parr, their brother-in-law, William Herbert, earl of Pembroke and Anne Heneage, who may have been one of Elisabeth’s attendants and was distant kin via the Poyntz family.

In the summer of 1562 Elisabeth was diagnosed with jaundice and fever and nearly died. She was treated by German physician, Burchard Kranich (1515-1578), known as Doctor Burcot, who had arrived at court during the reign of Mary and was involved in the treatment Queen Elizabeth received for smallpox later in 1562. The circumstances of Elisabeth’s illness and eventual recovery were a feature of diplomatic correspondence across Europe in the summer and early autumn of 1562. William Cecil wrote from London to Nicholas Throckmorton in Paris, as did John Somers and Nicholas’s wife, Anne. The news also reached Elisabeth’s brother, Henry Cobham, and Thomas Chaloner in Madrid. Rather bluntly they were informed ‘[t]he Lady of Bedford is dead and the lady Marques of Northamptons sicknes and recovery cannot be unanswered unto you’ which prompted a heartfelt letter from Chaloner to the by then recuperating marchioness. Henry Cobham returned to England with great haste following the receipt of the bad news regarding his sister’s health. When Cobham and Chaloner briefly fell out, Chaloner used Elisabeth’s recent health scare as an aid to persuade Henry to mend their quarrel.

---

288 Hoby, *Courtier*, sig. a i; SP 70/40 ff. 72-6 (stamped 65-7), Dymock’s statement, 6 August 1562.
290 Ibid.
291 SP 70/40 f. 271 (stamped 241), John Somers to NT, 29 August 1562, SP 70/41 f. 184 (stamped 177), AT to NT, 20 September 1562. For more on Burcot, see M. B. Donald, ‘Burchard Kranish (c. 1515-1578), Miner and Queen’s Physician’, *Annals of Science, vi* (1950), 308-22 and ‘A further note of Burchard Kranich’, *Annals of Science, vii* (1951) and F. E. Hallday, ‘Queen Elizabeth and Dr Burcot’, *History Today, v* (1955).
292 SP 70/40 f. 269 (stamped 239), WC to NT, 29 August 1562, SP 70/40 f. 271 (stamped 241), John Somers to NT, 29 August 1562, SP 70/41 f. 184 (stamped 177), AT to NT, 20 September 1562 and SP 70/41 f. 184 (stamped 178), AT to NT, 20 September 1562.
293 SP 70/42 f. 183 (stamped 189), William Honnyng to TC, 12 October 1562. Chaloner’s correspondence with Elisabeth is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.
294 SP 70/47 f. 75 (stamped 76), TC to HC, 20 December 1562.
Elisabeth’s only surviving letter from the Elizabethan period was written to Thomas Chaloner in August 1562 thanking him for his kindness done to her brother, Henry, during their time on embassy together in Spain.\textsuperscript{295} This letter forms part of a correspondence with Chaloner that features three letters from the ambassador to the marchioness and just the single note of reply from Elisabeth to Chaloner.\textsuperscript{296} These four letters are clearly not the extent of their correspondence; letters between Chaloner and Elisabeth’s siblings, William and Henry Cobham also illustrate that the siblings were collaborating with Chaloner on a marriage suit that was unfortunately unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{297} Writing to Elisabeth with regard to the failure of his suit Chaloner was annoyed with his brother for improperly handing the suit, and claimed that even more at fault were the ladies of Elizabeth’s court, as

\begin{quote}
the revealing of it came to passe as comenly al Secretes do that fall into womens custodye namely of that qualitie, where in counsell from oone to an other of the Counseilleresses at last some oone or other telles owte of the Counseil chambre with always apec more putt to…\textsuperscript{298}
\end{quote}

By highlighting the involvement of both men and women of the Elizabethan court in the conduct (and failure) of his marriage suit Chaloner’s letter alludes to Elisabeth’s position within her familial and a wider court network, and hints at the role of Elizabeth’s female courtiers in the conduct of court and political affairs, through their positions as confidantes or ‘gossips’ of the Queen, who passed information into and out of the Queen’s chambers.\textsuperscript{299}

Also in 1562, Elisabeth may have been involved in Queen Elizabeth’s marital negotiations with Erik XIV of Sweden. Extant evidence suggests that a network of courtiers was working to disrupt the Swedish marriage negotiations, with the tacit approval of the Queen and her councillors. The Habsburg ambassador, de Quadra, asserted in his dispatches that Francis Bertie, a man who appears sporadically in the court records and state papers but seems to have had no discernible role at court, had outraged and misled the Swedish delegation in England into believing that Queen Elizabeth was already married

\begin{footnotes}
\item[295] SP 70/40 f. 92 (stamped 84), EPMoN to TC, 7 August 1562.
\item[296] The correspondence between Chaloner and the marchioness in chronological order is: SP 70/38 f. 262 (stamped 219), TC to EPMoN, 26 June 1562, SP 70/40 f. 92 (stamped 84), EPMoN to TC, 7 August 1562, SP70/40ff. 215-8 (stamped 190-193) TC to EPMoN, 20 August 1562 and Bl Add. MS 35832 ff. 82-4, TC to EPMoN, 14 October 1562.
\item[297] Ibid and SP70/40 f. 205 (stamped 208), TC to WBLC, 14 October 1562 and SP70/40 f.75 (stamped 76), TC to HC, 20 December 1562.
\item[298] SP 70/38 f. 262 (stamped 219), TC to EPMoN, 26 June 1562.
\item[299] Discussed in detail in chapter 5.
\end{footnotes}
to her favourite, Robert Dudley, while the Swedish King continued to woo her.\textsuperscript{300} Surviving correspondence attests to the role that Bertie played in disrupting the Swedish negotiations, supported by Elisabeth Parr.\textsuperscript{301} The Swedish ambassador, Nils Gyllenstierna, believed that Bertie’s actions were largely responsible for the failure of his embassy and on his return to Sweden he put his feelings in writing. Gyllenstierna trusted that the Queen would ‘bear witness to his fidelity and diligence in executing his charge’ and outlined his case against Bertie, including his slander of the Queen herself, and begged Elizabeth to silence Bertie and ‘cause him to be properly punished.’ No action was taken in response to Gyllenstierna’s pleas to the Queen, nor after he enlisted the help of William Cecil and Ambrose Cave, another of Elizabeth’s courtiers. When even King Erik’s own petition for Bertie to be punished went unanswered it became clear that someone or some people at the English court were protecting him, or that the Queen herself believed him undeserving of punishment.\textsuperscript{302}

A possible explanation can be found in a secret note written by Habsburg ambassador Christopher D’Assonleville in May 1563.\textsuperscript{303} According to D’Assonleville, Bertie was an ‘extremely astute, subtle, double dealing, greedy and malicious man, if there ever were one in the world.’ D’Assonleville claimed Bertie ‘has carried out many malicious practices to divert the [Swedish] King of this marriage with England’. D’Assonleville confirmed that members of the English Court were protecting Bertie as he was patronised by Robert Dudley and by Elisabeth Parr, described as ‘first lady of honour of the Queen and an astute woman’. Dudley had instigated Bertie’s attack on the Swedish negotiations, but when matters came to a head and the Queen ‘attempted’ to arrest Bertie he was hidden by the marchioness in her private chambers before being dispatched to the Continent with money swindled from the unfortunate Swedish ambassador.\textsuperscript{304} According to D’Assonleville a number of leading courtiers such as Elisabeth Parr, Robert Dudley and Secretary William Cecil were involved in and sanctioned this disreputable activity at the expense of not only the Swedish suit but also the Queen’s reputation; and this behaviour was fully endorsed by

\textsuperscript{300} BdQ to MDuP, 20 August 1562, RP, III, DCCCCXXVIII, 108.
\textsuperscript{301} ‘Franciscus Barti ut solebat dum presens hic esset, T Ex\textsuperscript{es} afficere medalijs, sic ille absentem idem facere scriptis, andio: ac semper in eius veteri infamia manere: hic est, Regis ma\textsuperscript{is} multum pecuniam illi debuisse.’ SP 70/41 f. 127 (stamped 122), NG to QE, 14 September 1562.
\textsuperscript{302} SP 70/43 f.76 (stamped 76), Erik of Sweden to QE, 20 October 1562; SP 70/44 f. 111 (stamped 104), NG to WC, 9 November 1562; SP 70/44 f. 113 (stamped 106), NG to Ambrose Cave, 9 November 1562 [originales all in Latin].
\textsuperscript{303} Secret note by Christopher D’Assonleville, 23 May 1563, MCXIX, RP, III, 630. Thanks to Mr James Everest for his help with the translation. For the original text see Appendix B.
\textsuperscript{304} Secret note by Christopher D’Assonleville, 23 May 1563, MCXIX, RP, III, 630.
Elizabeth herself. Elisabeth’s involvement in this affair is perhaps supported by her continued association with Bertie after their anti-Swedish activity in 1562 - he aided the marchioness during her time in the Low Countries in 1564 and his son is the only child not related to Parr mentioned in her paraphernalia bequests in 1565.

In late 1563 or early 1564 Elisabeth Parr was found to be suffering from an illness that was probably breast cancer. She first sought treatment for her condition at the English court, but her treatment by the Queen’s physicians was unsuccessful, not least because of some inappropriate behaviour by the physician’s assistant. The privy council met at Westminster on 22 January 1564 and discussed the ‘lewde maner of usage’ committed in the marchioness’ chambers by Griffith, the servant of Doctor Julio. Both Julio and Griffith were sent to the Marshalsea Prison to await punishment. Subsequently, Julio was ordered to be a sutour to the Ladye Marchioness of Northampton, aswell for his owne purgacion as also for his servantes delyverye, and what her Ladyshipp shall thinke convenient to be donne herin the Lordes will upon thunderstanding therof take such furder order as shalbe mete.

How Griffith was to be punished was put into William Parr’s hands; the privy council records state that ‘Doctour Julio’s man [must] be brought to the Marques of Northampton.’ What happened when Elisabeth’s husband met her ‘grete disturbance’ is unfortunately lost to us and can only be imagined.

Following the failure of the English court’s physicians, Elisabeth Parr sought and obtained permission from Queen Elizabeth to travel to Antwerp for treatment. The Queen herself wrote to Margaret, duchess of Parma and regent of the Netherlands to acquaint her with the situation and beg favour for her favourite. Elisabeth travelled in the company of her brother, William Brooke, and Frances, his wife. Lord Cobham participated in the

305 For more on this incident see McKeen, 124-5; BdQ to MDuP, 20 August 1562, RP, III, 108. Elisabeth’s quasi-diplomatic involvement in this suit on behalf of her friend the Queen is fully contextualized in chapter 5.
306 CP 3/38, HC to Thomas Middleton, 11 May 1564; CP 3/6-7 and 336, Elisabeth Parr’s paraphernalia bequests, 31 March 1565.
307 APC, 185, Doctor Julio and Griffiths versus the marquess and marchioness of Northampton, January 1564.
308 It is probable that ‘Doctour Julio’ was actually the Italian Dr Giulio Borgarucci, a controversial figure later in the employ of Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and a key figure in the slanderous Leicester’s Commonwealth of 1584. Patrick Collinson, Archbishop Grindal, 1519-1583: The Struggle for a Reformed Church (California: University of California Press, 1979), 255.
309 APC, 188-189, Doctor Julio and Griffiths versus the marquess and marchioness of Northampton, January 1564.
310 SP70/70 f. 9 (stamped 5), QE to MDuP, 4 April 1564. RP, IV, 4-5, MCCLXX, 21.
circulation of news about the marchioness by writing from the Continent to his close friend William Cecil at the court, updating him on the condition of his ill sister, pregnant wife and himself. Upon the party’s arrival on the Continent Cobham informed Cecil

I thought it good to let yow know of my Ladye marquys estat and myne syns owr latte passayge. Surlye my Ladye marquys littel or nothyng trubled my wife nomuche more and I moste of all. but thankes be yevone to god when are not betterd by that desas[.] and macke haste to anttwerpe for our ententyd porposse.  

Thomas Chaloner was also kept informed of the severity of the marchioness’ condition. Richard Clough wrote from Antwerp ‘at thys enstence my lady markes ys here in this towne to have remedy ffor a sore brest butt she ys in so sober a casse as I do moste doubt of her liffe.’

During her time in the Low Countries for treatment Elisabeth had charged her brother Henry Cobham - now back in England - to manage her affairs, including dealing with Edward, Baron Hastings of Loughborough regarding the purchase of a piece of land. Simultaneously, April 1564 seems to mark a resurgence of Elisabeth’s attempts to regain the land enfeoffed to her by William Parr in 1547 and wrongly confiscated by Queen Mary following Parr’s attainder for treason, c. 1553. While Elisabeth was overseas, the privy council sent a letter to the earl of Cumberland instructing him to ‘conforme him self to come to an ende with the Lady Marques of Northampton for a mater of lande long hanging in controversy betwixt them.’ How or whether he did so is no longer extant. But from at least July 1560, Elisabeth had been involved in a land dispute with Henry Clifford over a parcel of land in Grasmere. The earl of Cumberland’s manorial court rolls record a dispute between his tenants and Elisabeth Parr’s that could well have arisen from the confusion over her status and landholdings in the 1550s.

No cure or successful treatment was found for Elisabeth’s cancer in the Netherlands. She was escorted home in May 1564 by Dr John Dee, the Queen’s leading astrologer who was in Antwerp overseeing the printing of his Theologica Mathematica, including a

---

311 SP12/33 [f. 61] (stamped 128), WBL to WC, 12 April 1564 and SP 12/33 [f. ?] (stamped 140), WBL to WC, 22 April 1564.
312 SP 70/71 f.3 (stamped 5), Richard Clough to TC, 4 May 1564.
313 CP 3/38, 296, HC to Thomas Middleton, 11 May 1564.
314 CPR I, Edward VI pt. 1 [roll 799] vol. 1, 19 April 1547; SP 11/12 f. 47 (stamped 100), QM to Edward Waldegrave, 5 March 1558 and SP 12/7 [f. 31] (stamped 46), QE to William Paulet, marquess of Winchester, 1 November 1559.
315 APC, 142, 22 April 1564.
316 DLONSL5/2/11/1, Court rolls of Henry Clifford, earl of Cumberland relating to Grasmere, Westmorland, 5 July 1560, surviving in Cumbria Archive Services, Carlisle.
presentation copy for Emperor Maximilian II, to whom the text was dedicated.\footnote{Glyn Parry's biography of John Dee highlights that Dee ‘returned to England as medical escort to the dying Elizabeth Parr, Marchioness of Northampton.’ Attempting to contextualise Elisabeth among the Tudor nobility, however, Parry records that ‘[h]er father George Brooke, Lord Cobham, was cousin to Thomas Wyatt, so Dee owed this appointment to family ties through the Wildes of Gravesend.’ In 1564 George Brooke was dead and Elisabeth’s brother, William had become Lord Cobham. Parry does not specify which Thomas Wyatt he is referring to - William and Elisabeth were cousins to Thomas Wyatt the younger, and George Brooke was brother-in-law to Wyatt senior. Although not a significant error, nor one that invalidates the Kentish connection, Parry’s comments highlight the confusion over Elisabeth’s identity and her Cobham relatives that still endures. G. J. R. Parry, Arch Conjurer of England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) 60-61.} Attempts to cure Elisabeth continued once she had returned home. Roger Ascham, the Queen’s Latin secretary, wrote on her behalf to the Maximillian II, King of Bohemia, requesting that his private physician could remain in England to aid the marchioness, and her list of debts at the time of her death includes payments to various physicians and apothecaries.\footnote{BL Royal MS 13 B 1, f. 1, QE to Maximillian II, King of Bohemia, May 1564; SP12/36 [f. ?] (stamped 62-3), Elisabeth’s debts at death, 31 March 1565.} During the summer of 1564 the Queen and her court went on progress, leaving the invalid marchioness in London, where she began a friendship with the newly arrived Habsburg ambassador, Guzman de Silva, likely because of the friendship she had formed with his sovereign, Margaret, duchess of Parma when overseas. De Silva kept the duchess informed of his progress in resuming negotiations for Queen Elizabeth to marry Archduke Charles of Austria. Surviving correspondence suggests that de Silva’s friendship with and regard for the marchioness were instrumental in his conduct of the negotiations.\footnote{RP, IV, MCCCLXX, 4-5, GdS to MDuP, 23 September 1564; a translated extract of this letter is printed in CSP Foreign, 1564-1565, 287.} With regard to their burgeoning relationship, de Silva reported to the duchess of Parma, reminding her that

the marchioness of Northampton is a great favourite of the Queen, and I am gaining the goodwill of her intimates so as to gain more influence over her mistress. She is a person of great understanding, and is so esteemed by the Queen that some little friction exists between her and Robert [Dudley].\footnote{RP, IV, MCCXXIII, 110-113, GdS to MDuP, 23 September 1564.}

De Silva used the relationship between the two favourites as evidence for the innocence of that between the Queen and Dudley, asserting that the marchioness bore herself towards Dudley, and associated with him ‘in a way that they together … make me doubt sometimes whether Robert’s position is so irregular as many think.’

Days after highlighting his concerns over Elizabeth’s sincerity de Silva reported that as he was leaving following a visit to the marchioness, she said she had something
important to say to him, which would have to wait for another day. A few days later he went to visit and found Elisabeth and the Queen dining almost alone. The women openly discussed the Queen’s marriage prospects in front of the ambassador and led him to believe that the Queen was seriously considering the prospect of marriage with the Archduke.\textsuperscript{322} Seemingly confirming this, a few days later Elisabeth dispatched a catholic treasury secretary with a message for de Silva, telling him that she and the Queen had discussed the Archduke, and if the ambassador could arrange for them to communicate, they might be able to make sure the match progressed. De Silva replied that he would do his best but was loath to act without confirmation from the Queen regarding her intentions, or from the Archduke as to his preferences and position.\textsuperscript{323} De Silva had also learnt from the failures of his predecessor de Quadra in terms of trusting Queen Elizabeth and her women’s words, so he quickly wrote to his mistress, Margaret, duchess of Parma, asking her advice on how to proceed before rushing into action. As the ambassador wrote to the duchess,

\begin{quote}
It occurred to me to tell Your Grace of this so that you may know what is happening ... and also because, if Your Grace has heard anything on this matter, to inform me as soon as possible, without delay what it is I should do in accordance with Your Grace’s understanding of these matters.\textsuperscript{324}
\end{quote}

The marriage negotiations continued for several years, but the marchioness did not. De Silva’s correspondence mentioned that Elisabeth had praised a physician who had treated her during her time in the Low Countries.\textsuperscript{325} Maximillan II’s private physician, Michel ab Othen. Dr Michel, as he appears to have been known, treated the marchioness during her sojourn in the Netherlands and was requested to travel to England to continue Elisabeth’s treatment in May 1564. The Queen herself wrote requesting that Maximillian send his physician, and again in November 1564 requesting that he be allowed to stay a while longer.\textsuperscript{326} Despite his and other physicians’ best efforts, Elisabeth succumbed. At Whitehall Palace, London, Elisabeth Parr née Cobham, marchioness of Northampton, died of breast cancer on 2 April 1565, aged 39.

In the months surrounding her death in the spring of 1565 Elisabeth’s affairs were put in order, and accounts of her paraphernalia bequests, her debts, her jewels sold to pay

\textsuperscript{322} RP, IV, MCCCXXIII, 110-113, GdS to MDuP, 23 September 1564.
\textsuperscript{323} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{325} RP, IV, MCC, 58-61, GdS to MDuP, 17 July 1564.
\textsuperscript{326} BL, Royal MS 13 B 1, f. 1, QE to Maximilian II, King of Bohemia, May 1564; Calendar of Clarendon State Papers, QE to Maximilian II, King of Bohemia, 27 November 1564.
her debts, her landholdings and the accounts for her funeral survive.\textsuperscript{327} Two copies of her paraphernalia bequests at death survive; a contemporary 1565 draft shows she often changed her mind about individual bequests.\textsuperscript{328} The fair copy was misfiled in the Cecil Papers, endorsed ‘Gifts of the Earl of Lincoln’ and catalogued by a later hand as referring to ‘Lady Eliz. Brooke of Norten c. 1585’ - a bastardisation of Lady Elisabeth Northampton, née Brooke which may also date from 1565. The fair copy has annotations in William Cecil’s own hand. One of the beneficiaries of Elisabeth’s bequests was her niece Elizabeth Brooke, the three-year-old daughter of William Brooke, Lord Cobham, who would later marry William Cecil, earl of Salisbury.\textsuperscript{329} Elizabeth and her identical twin sister, Frances, both inherited rings with rubies. The key beneficiaries of Elisabeth’s personal items were immediate family, kin and other courtiers, some of whom might have been her attendants. One, Jane Newton, was Elisabeth’s sister-in-law through Frances Newton’s 1559 marriage to William, Lord Cobham.

The accounts of Elisabeth’s debts at her death are revealing of the practicalities of her final days. She owed £100 each to Lady Elizabeth Clinton and Anne Seymour, former duchess of Somerset - a huge sum. Symptomatic of her condition she owed £118 6s to Mr Michael the surgeon for his continued treatment. She also owed £116 to Edward the apothecary and 6s ‘To the Quenes Majesties Department of the still howse’. She also had

\textsuperscript{327} CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; CP 163/136 - Gifts by the Elis. Brooke, Lady Norten, [1585?]; SP12/36 f. ? (stamped 58-60), Funeral accounts for Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton, 31 March 1565; SP 12/36 [f. ?] (stamped 62-3), Accounts of the debts at death of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; SP 12/37 [ff. ?] (stamped143 and 145), EPMoN’s land income at death, c. 1565. This is approximately £103,000 today. SP 12/36 [f. ?] (stamped 144-145), The note of Sutche Jewells as were sent in to Flainders vnto my brother Pasquelo Spinola and by hyme solde as herafter Followythe, May 1565. £1054 9s 11d from 1565 equates to roughly £183,366 c. 2005); BL Additional MS 37666 f. 38 and Thynne, Holinshed’s Chronicles, 797.

\textsuperscript{328} CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of EPMoN, 31 March 1565 and CP 163/136 - Gifts by the Elis. Brooke, Lady Norten, [1585?].

\textsuperscript{329} Elizabeth Brooke and Robert Cecil married in 1589. David Loades, The Cecils (London: The National Archives, 2007), 189; Stephen Alford, Burghley (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 311. When Brooke died in childbirth Robert Cecil was devastated and erected a memorial in her honour in the Cecil family tomb in the Chapel of St. Nicholas, Westminster Abbey, adorned with the verses:

A Brooke by Name, the Baron Cobham’s Child,
A Newton was she, by her Mother’s Side,
Cecil her Husbande, this for her did Builde,
To prove his Love did after Death abide,
Which tells unto the Worldes that after come
The Worde’s Concepte, whilst here she held a Rome,
How Nature made her wife and well beseeminge,
Wit and Condition, silente, trew and chaste,
[Her vertues rare wann her much esteminge
in Court with Soveraigne, still favour gracd,]
Earth could not yealde more pleasinge earthly Blisse,
Blest with two Babes, the third brought her to this.
debts to pay to her servants for wages and 20s was paid ‘to the powre woman of the keichin.’ All in all her debts amounted to more than £3500. Much of Elisabeth’s finery and possessions, particularly her jewels, were sold off in the Low Countries by Pascale Spinola, to offset some of her debt. In total, Elisabeth’s jewels sold in Antwerp raised £1054 9s 11d. Elisabeth’s landholdings - that had been the source of so much angst and consternation throughout her life - would not have been of any use in offsetting her debts as, according to the terms of both the original enfeoffment by William Parr in 1547 and Queen Elizabeth’s warrant and instructions from 1559, upon Elisabeth’s death her lands reverted to William Parr’s ownership. Nevertheless it is noteworthy that her landholdings across Westmoreland, Lancashire, Essex and York amounted to rents of approximately £600 per annum.

Queen Elizabeth paid for Elisabeth’s state funeral and burial at St Paul’s Cathedral. She was buried in Old St Paul’s near to the tomb of John of Gaunt, the founding father of the Lancastrian Tudor line. What those closest to her felt on the occasion of her death is unrecorded, but her brother Henry Cobham’s inscription in the family Book of Hours dated two days after her death (and situated only two folios after Elisabeth’s own inscription in the first blank space) might offer some clue. Cobham’s inscription is one of devotion and loyalty; he writes

Aprilis 11: 1565
All fryndlynes vnto my frynds and to my kynne all kynelynes:
vnto my my god a syncere hart and to my Prynce all umbleness.
Henry Cobham

Although not directly dedicated to his sister, the devotional tone of the inscription, its timing and placement seem significant, and for an inscription to serve a memorial purpose in such a manuscript would be logical. The only surviving portrait of Elisabeth is also a memorial tribute and acknowledges her position as the political centre of her family.

330 SP 12/36 [f. ?] (stamped 62-3) , Accounts of the debts at death of EPMoN, 31 March 1565.
331 SP 12/36 [f. ?] (stamped 144-145), The note of Sutche Jewells as were sent in to Flainders vnto my brother Pasquelo Spinola and by hymse solde as herafter Followythe, May 1565. £1054 9s 11d from 1565 equates to roughly £183,366 c. 2005).
332 SP 12/37 [ff. ?] (stamped143 and 145), EPMoN’s land income at death, c. 1565. This is approximately £103,000 today.
333 BL, Additional MS 37666 f. 38; Thynne, Holinshed’s Chronicles, 797.
334 The Hever Manuscript Hours, f. 39v.
335 Two versions of the Cobham family potrait are in existence today, the original at Longleat House, Wiltshire as the property of the Marquess of Bath and the second at Bolton Hall, Yorkshire in the collection of the Devonshire family. There is debate over the identification of the women in the portrait but I follow Susan James and Katlijne van der Stighelen’s interpretation. For more discussion of the portrait see fig. 5, 87, and James and van der Stighelen, 66-101.
Based on an earlier portrait, the Cobham family portrait was completed in 1567, up to two years after Elisabeth’s death. The panel portrait features Elisabeth alongside her brother, William Brooke, Lord Cobham and his wife Frances, and their children. The family is clothed richly but all in black, mourning the passing of the marchioness and marking the prominent place that she held and continued to hold in their family and their lives.

Elisabeth’s tomb in St Paul’s was destroyed in the fire of London in 1666, but other memorials remain. Hoby’s translation of The Courtisan and Stephen van Herwijck’s portrait medal immortalised Elisabeth’s image at the peak of her significance. Her death was also marked in verse. A ballad by William Elderton, titled ‘A proper new balad in praise of my Ladie Marques, Whose death is bewailed’ was printed 1569, but likely dates from earlier. Elderton describes the ‘Ladie Marques’ as one ‘whose courting need not to be tolde’ - a reference to the Parrs’ turbulent marital history, as well as referencing her well known role as suitor to Queen Elizabeth, remarking ‘mee thinkes she shuld be still in place / A pitifull speaker to a Queene, / Bewailinge every poore mans case, / As many a time shee hath ben scene.’ Elderton’s intimate knowledge of Elisabeth and his affection for her are evident in his description of her as ‘the fairest flower of my garland’ who was ‘caught from court a great while agoe’ and his factual assertion that ‘under the roufe of sweet Sant Paull / There lyeth my Ladye buried in Claye.’

The last reference to Elisabeth in the state papers is as ambiguous as the first more than 20 years before. Following Elisabeth’s death, William Parr had involved himself with a young Swedish gentlewoman, of whom it was said ‘he pursued her until she caught him’ - supporting speculation that Parr was consoling himself over Elisabeth’s death by dallying with the young Helena von Snakenbourg as per his early 1540s habits, rather than

336 STC 7562, W. M. Elderton, A proper new balad in praise of my Ladie Marques, Whose death is bewailed, To the tune of a new lusty gallant (London: Thomas Colwell, 1569). See fig. 8, 89.
337 Ibid. See a full transcription in Appendix B.
339 Chapuy’s potential reference to Elisabeth as a possible candidate for Henry VIII’s sixth wife from 1542: LP, Henry VIII, 1542, 6, E.C to CV, late January 1542.
seriously intending to replace his beloved wife. When in 1566 a delegation of lords was sent to Queen Elizabeth to encourage her to finally take a husband Elizabeth publicly turned on Parr and ‘scathingly suggested he look to his own marital situation before presuming to advise her’. The Queen’s rebuke of Parr could be interpreted as a reference both to Elizabeth’s concern regarding Parr’s apparent disregard for the sanctity of marriage - his first wife, Anne Bourchier was still living - as well as a desire to preserve the memory of her recently deceased and much beloved friend. Supporting the latter, David McKeen succinctly summarised Elisabeth Parr’s importance to the Queen and her court with the words:

The royal rebuke reminds us that, though the public acclaim was Northampton’s, the intimate hold that the Parrs and their circle had upon Elizabeth came from her love for the lady her contemporaries knew simply as Lady Marquess.

In 1566 Queen Elizabeth deemed that Parr was not free to marry - his remarriage was impeded by the enduring Anne Bourchier, the first Lady Parr and it was not until Anne’s death in 1571 that Parr married for the third time. Helena von Snakenbourg, the second marchioness of Northampton came to be a very important member of Elizabeth’s court - even acting as the chief mourner at the Queen’s funeral in 1603.

Elisabeth Parr died just seven years into Elizabeth Tudor’s 45-year-long reign, but the friendship between the women had lasted more than two decades. Her career at the Tudor court spanned at least 24 years and five monarchs. This chronological reconstruction of Elisabeth Parr’s life and activity has resurrected the little remembered marchioness in order to precipitate a meaningful discussion of how her court career fits within the canon of politically active women operating at the mid-Tudor courts, c. 1547-1565.

340 CSP Span. 1566, 591-2, GdS to PoS, 4 November 1566; HMC Salisbury, I, 326, Memoranda by Fowler, January 1565/6; Correspondence diplomatique de Bertrand de Salignac de la Motte Fénélon…, ed. A. Teulet (Paris and London: 1838-1840) IV, 94.

341 The acts of parliament that allowed Parr to legally separate from his adulterous first wife and remarry, and retrospectively legalized and recognised Elisabeth and William’s marriage applied only in their case. To marry for a third time, Parr required a further act of parliament or the death of his original spouse.

342 McKeen, 92.
Illustrations

Figure 1. Elisabeth Parr’s inscriptions in the family *Book of Hours*, Hever MS Hours, f. 37v.
Figure 2. SP70/40 f. 92 (stamped 84), Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton to Thomas Chaloner, 7 August 1562

My moste excellent brother,

I do understand by a brother your message he is to bring to you, ther is not soe one that as some part of the kingdom send you my thanks by the hand of my noble lady hand, as one that it is said I could make some requit for the great friendship you have done to my brother, and if you desire more requit may in another place and as I do expect that done to my brother, as done to myself, so shall I requit, and be as thankfull for it as your doyntu meritorous, the requiring you to have written unlesse a real requit in hand by cares for an epistle shal, your assured

Jane E Northampton
Figure 3. Folger Losely MS Lb. 455, Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton to William More, [1551?]

Good morrow as I am writen curr to thank you for the heavens you gane shown to my brother. So my regerd by you to make a request to you to show powerfull to give part of a house in the estate yfans so far as you have made them part of a house in the estate yfans. So you may show as you have made the house and one rather as my request may be accededly as done to me self. If I commend me to you as your assisf and
dynd E Northampton

L. b. 455
Figure 4. Book III of *The Courtier* trans. Thomas Hoby, 1551.

*The Thirde Booke of the Courtier of Counte Baldessar Castigliano unto M. Alphonse Ariosto.*

Engliished at the request of the Ladye Marquise of Northamptone, in anno 1551.

It is read that Pythagoras, when he would understand the measure of Hercules' body, in that he knew that the space where every spire yeeres they kept the games & prizes of Olympia in Arcadia, night unto Elis before Jupiter Olympius Temple, was measured by Hercules himselfe: and appointed a surfonge of grounde there of five hundred and five and twenty of his owne yeere: and the other surfonges which he after his time were made in diverse partes of Greece by his successors, were also of five hundred and five and twenty of their yeere, but for all that somewhat shorter then his,

Pythagoras knewe furth with by that proportion how much Hercules' coate was bigger then at the other mens coates, and so the measure of his coate once known, he gathered of all Hercules' body proportionally in greatnesse exceeded all other mens, so much, as that surfonge, all other surfonges. You may then (gentle M. Alphonse) by the very same reason gather by this laste parte of all the rest of the bodye, how faire the Court of Virgil excelled all the other in Italy. For if the sports & pastimes (that are used to none other end but to refresh ye & to some minutes after earnest labours) far passed all such as are commonly used in other Courts of Italy: What (gottye you) inure all the notorious practises, wherein to all menne had their minds bent, were fully & wholly addicted. And of this I may be bounte to make my vant, nothing mistrusting.
Figure 5. The Cobham Family portrait.

Figure 6. Portrait medal of Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton by Stephen van Herwijck, c. 1562.
Figure 7. The tomb of Lord and Lady Cobham in St. Mary’s church, Cobham; detail of five of the Cobham sons

Detail of Elisabeth and her sister, Anne.
Figure 8. A proper new balad in praise of my Ladie Marques, W. M. Elderton, c. 1569.
Chapter 3: Quasi-consorts and rival courts, 1547-1553

Henry VIII ruled England for 38 years, from 1509 until 1547 when he was succeeded by his nine-year-old son, Edward VI. Edward’s youth precipitated a restructuring of the court including the formation of a protectorate council to support and guide the young monarch. The court did not feature the predominantly female household that would normally have served a Queen consort because Edward was unmarried, therefore the restructuring involved the removal of women from the court in an official capacity. This chapter establishes the political context for women during the reign of Edward VI, highlighting their use of networks of influence and methods of petitioning to further their own and their family’s agendas at a queenless court. Integrating Elisabeth Parr née Cobham into the context of this novel situation highlights her political engagement and the advancement of her political alliances and principles across the Edwardian period, as she developed her public image and reputation as marchioness of Northampton, c. 1547-1553.

The scholarly context

Edwardian historiography has undergone a major revision in the last two decades with far more attention being focused on the figure of the young king himself, rather than his advisors. Of particular relevance to this thesis, however, is arguably the largest lacuna in Tudor historiography - the very limited scholarship examining the presence and role of women at the Edwardian court beyond the period of time as relevant to particular individual women. Edwardian historiography frequently considers the reign of Edward VI within the context of the reigns that preceded and followed his own - his father, Henry VIII’s and his sister, Mary I’s. This is in part due to the relative brevity of Edward’s reign within the context of the long Tudor century, but more significantly because of the high level of political and religious upheaval that took place across the six years of the young King’s reign. David Loades and Whitney Jones argued that Edward’s reign sat in a turbulent mid-Tudor period or mid-sixteenth century (c. 1540-1565) and should be considered in the broader Tudor context. Acknowledging this, George Bernard and Penry Williams wrote in their preface to Jennifer Loach’s posthumously published Edward VI, that until the close of the twentieth century, ‘the reign of Edward together … with that of his sister Mary, was presented as amounting to no more than an insignificant and

343 See, for example, Guy, Tudor England, 198-200; Loades, Intrigue and Treason, 27-34; Loades, The Tudor Court, and MacCulloch, The Bay King, 1-8.
344 Jones, The Mid-Tudor Crisis, 1539-1563; Loades, The Mid-Tudor Crisis and The Tudor Court.
turbulent interlude between the glowing and creative reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth. Stephen Alford concurs, noting that in some earlier scholarship ‘the middle Tudor monarchs, sandwiched between the “greatness” of Henry VIII and the “glories” of Elizabeth I, often look like the poor relations of dynasty, occupying (and indeed shaping) a decade beset by crisis and instability.’ Alford’s revisionist interpretation of Edward’s reign, however, sees it as leaving ‘a double legacy of people and ideas: a complex set of ideas with which to decode (or confuse) the relationship between monarch and subject and polity and church, complemented by fascinating and complex networks of friendship, association, and office.’ From the beginning of the twentieth century until the first decade of the twenty-first most of the scholarship on the court of Edward VI focused on individual figures of prominence - Lord Protector Somerset and Lord President Dudley - and their impact on the King and court, rather than on the young King himself. Major scholarly works focusing on the personalities and policies of these two ‘great men’ - as part of a now less fashionable ‘great man school of history’ - included A. F. Pollard’s *England under Protector Somerset* (1900), M. L. Bush’s *The Government Policy of Protector Somerset* (1975) and Jennifer Loach’s *Protector Somerset: A Reassessment* (1994), stamping the personal authority of Edward Seymour onto Edward’s reign; as Philip Lindsay’s *The Queenmaker* (1951) and Berret L. Beer’s *Northumberland* (1973) did for John Dudley. W. K. Jordan’s major contributions to Edwardian scholarship - *The Chronicle and Political Papers of King Edward VI* (1966) and *Edward VI the Young King* (1968) - set the tone for Alford’s 2002 revision.

Chris Skidmore, Stephen Alford and Diarmaid MacCulloch have taken steps to reconsider the young King’s personal authority and present his political contribution, building upon the mid-century biography of Edward by Hester Chapman, whose young King was personable and active, but whose work was intended for a general readership and does not provide detailed political or governmental analysis upon which a reader could

---

346 Alford, *Kingship and Politics*, xiii.
347 Ibid.

90
base a case for Edward’s personal authority.\textsuperscript{350} Skidmore’s Edward emerges as a King who was a ‘child prodigy’ and who wrote secret notes to himself in Greek to hide his thoughts from nosy courtiers and, under the guidance of his tutors, immersed himself into a scholarly world of Protestant theology and Renaissance humanism.\textsuperscript{351}

For MacCulloch’s \textit{Boy King} Edward’s ‘youth was, of course, both his asset and his disadvantage.\textsuperscript{352} Elements of Edward’s reign subject to major revisions include the extent to which Edward was responsible for the \textit{Device for the Succession} - a political exercise for the young King devised by William Thomas according to Loades, and Edward’s own endeavour according to Alford - that allowed Jane Grey to usurp the throne left to Mary Tudor by Henry VIII.\textsuperscript{353} Alford asserts ‘although Dudley enforced the King’s will, it was Edward himself who set out to preserve his godly legacy and, implicitly, his political establishment.’\textsuperscript{354} Summarising the turbulence of July 1553 Alford claims

\begin{quote}
The great irony of 1553 is that without Edward, the boy-King, the regime crumbled. Without the person of the King - the body politic was headless, and a political establishment marked by a sophisticated coherence in the final years of the reign collapsed.\textsuperscript{355}
\end{quote}

The extent to which Edward’s authority was brought to bear on driving through reforms which went further than Henry VIII’s statutes is something on which Skidmore, MacCulloch and Alford agree. As an example of the extent to which scholarship now credits the King with political authority alongside his regents, Alford describes what he calls the Edwardian Protestant reformation as both ‘controversial and destructive’, claiming that the ‘notion of a reforming King, a second Josiah … counseled [and] profoundly conscious of his duty of care to God and to His subjects’ was at the heart of Edward’s personal motivations for his Kingship, and for his \textit{Device}.\textsuperscript{356}

The reign of Edward VI is touched upon in biographies of individual women such as the Princesses (later Queens) Mary and Elizabeth, Katherine Parr and Lady Jane Grey.\textsuperscript{357} Anne Seymour and Jane Dudley - wives to, respectively, Lord Protector Somerset and Lord

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{350} Hester Chapman, \textit{The Last Tudor King: A Study of Edward VI} (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958).
\textsuperscript{351} Skidmore, 6.
\textsuperscript{352} MacCulloch, \textit{The Boy King}, 18.
\textsuperscript{354} Alford, \textit{Kingship and Politics}, 172. See also Loades, \textit{The Reign of King Edward VI} and Tytler, \textit{England under the Reigns of Edward VI and Mary}.
\textsuperscript{355} Alford, \textit{Kingship and Politics}, 173-4.
\textsuperscript{356} Ibid. 100.
\textsuperscript{357} See, for example, Martienssen, \textit{Queen Katherine Parr}; Mueller, \textit{Katherine Parr}; as well as James, Porter and Norton’s biographies of Katherine Parr and Ives and de Lisle on Jane Grey.
\end{footnotesize}
President Dudley - are assessed in terms of their husbands: Jane Dudley was reduced by Philip Lindsay to just a wife, subject to assessments such as ‘without [John’s] company life offered little to her and … her spirit chose the grave that she might lie near him again.’

Anne Seymour and her alleged rivalry with Katherine Parr have been similarly treated, as has the concurrent rivalry between Thomas and Edward Seymour, played out on the court stage through their ambitious marriages. Alford’s work includes a historiographical review of Anne Seymour that documents the emergence of her shrewish reputation from scholarship beginning during the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth commenting that posthumous construction of reputation (of Anne, Edward Seymour and John Dudley) began ‘within weeks, if not days, of the King’s death.’ Alford characterises the rivalry between Anne Seymour and Katherine Parr as descending from seventeenth-century polemical scholarship such as that of Sir John Hayward, constructed from classical models of Tacitian quarrels of Agrippina and Domitia and the famous late sixteenth-century slanderer, Nicholas Sanders (he also targeted Anne Boleyn, crediting her with a sixth finger and abilities in the black arts), recited and regurgitated from that century until this. In this regard Alford does not credit the extent to which the original sources bear out Anne’s challenging personality and Katherine Parr’s bitterness at her treatment, but he does trace Anne Seymour’s enduringly unfavourable reputation beneath the nineteenth-century biographical anecdotes of Agnes Strickland.

More general studies of Tudor women practically ignore Edward’s reign, essentially because the traditional role of female courtier is anticipated not to continue as it was under Henry VIII, nor were there the same assumed changes to the role under a reigning queen. Scholarship on women operating during the reign of Edward VI that has bearing on this thesis includes the works of Barbara Harris, which highlight women’s roles at the early Tudor courts and her volume, Aristocratic Women, which addresses Tudor women up to 1550. Although not wholly court focused, Harris’ 2002 monograph provides a
framework for women’s ‘careers’ - Harris’ term - that is directly applicable to women’s activity and the role of female courtier during the reign of Edward VI. Dakota Hamilton's doctoral thesis on Katherine Parr’s household traces Katherine and her attendants’ activity into Edward’s reign, until Parr’s death in September 1548.\(^{364}\) Hamilton’s attention to the dowager queen’s household allows consideration of the politically significant role women did play during Edward’s reign. In a similar vein, to gain a full picture of the impact and importance of women during the reign of Edward VI it is important to consider the roles and positions of Edward’s sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, whose pre-accession households have been subject to consideration.\(^{365}\) In preparing this chapter, then, there was a limited body of scholarship directly relevant to the question of how noble women operated at Edward VI’s court without a queen. What follows is an interpretation of the evidence suggesting how Elisabeth Parr continued to operate as a female courtier independent of a queen consort, and how she conducted herself in her hard fought role as marchioness of Northampton, navigating the political turbulence of the years c. 1547-1553.

**Establishing Elisabeth - status and identity across the reign of Edward VI**

Of the 110 primary documents that directly relate to Elisabeth Parr uncovered during the preparation of this thesis, 27 pertain to the years during which Edward VI sat on England’s throne. A quarter of the documents for a quarter of the time period covered.\(^{366}\) The spread of evidence is not so equal, however; the surviving documents from 1547 and 1548 are entirely concerned with Elisabeth’s material state and legal circumstances due to her position in the household of Katherine Parr’s when dowager queen, and the complexities of her marriage to William Parr.\(^{367}\) Then there is a break, with only one piece of evidence that I infer relates to Elisabeth surviving from 1549 until Elisabeth was officially recognised as Parr’s wife and marchioness in 1550.\(^{368}\) From that point on the surviving documentation attests to a marked increase in Elisabeth’s prominence at and around the court of Edward VI through her presence in official documents, ambassadorial dispatches and personal accounts.\(^{369}\) This section will present the surviving evidence in order to reconstruct the way in which Elisabeth Parr established

---

364 Hamilton, ‘The Household of Queen Katherine Parr’.
366 Although technically the scope of this thesis is Elisabeth’s position during the reigns and at the courts of Edward, Mary and Elizabeth, for context for her court career it is necessary to present elements of her situation and activity from the reign of Henry VIII, c. 1542-1547.
367 See Appendix A, nos. 9-15.
368 Appendix A, no. 16.
369 Appendix A, nos. 17-36.
herself as marchioness of Northampton at the court of Edward VI, and how the particular circumstances of Edwardian England affected her conduct as a prominent noblewoman and female courtier.

At Henry VIII’s death in 1547, Katherine’s Queenly household included 26 ladies of the household, seven maids of honour, a ‘mother’ of the maids, six gentlewomen of the privy chamber - of which Elisabeth Cobham was one - and five chamberers.\textsuperscript{370} With regard to Elisabeth’s potential proximity to Katherine as a member of her household Hamilton comments that

although perhaps not as prominent as the ladies of the household, these other women, if only by virtue of their proximity to the queen, should not be overlooked or their influence underestimated.\textsuperscript{371}

Hamilton claims that the ladies of the household were the women ‘who had or were seen to have the most influence on Katherine Parr’.\textsuperscript{372} Although not a member of this elite group, Elisabeth was clearly operating in close enough proximity to the Queen’s court to catch the eye of her brother, William, and form acquaintances with the Queen’s ladies - women such as Katherine Brandon, duchess of Suffolk, Anne Seymour, countess of Hertford and Jane Dudley, countess of Warwick.\textsuperscript{373} These acquaintances developed and took on increased significance - both practical and political - when Elisabeth joined the ranks of the high nobility as marchioness of Northampton during the reign of Edward VI.\textsuperscript{374}

Referring to the activity of Katherine Parr’s royal household in the later years of her queenship, Hamilton claimed

One area in which it was permissible for women to take an active interest … was an area which actually became highly politicized towards the end of the reign. Katherine Parr and a number of her women inadvertently became political figures through their religious activities.\textsuperscript{375}

\textsuperscript{370} Hamilton, 112-3.
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{372} Ibid. 122.
\textsuperscript{373} All of whom appear as part of Katherine Parr’s royal household as Queen from 1543 and in some cases also her dower household from January 1547: TNA E179/69/41, f. 1, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1543-4; E179/69/48, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1544-5; E179/69/47, f. 62, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1545-6; E179/69/55, D1, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1545-6; E179/69/44, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1546-7; LC 2/2 f. 44, Ordinance for the Henry VIII’s funeral, 1547; E101/426/2 ff. 1, 5, Wage list for KP’s household as dowager Queen, 1547.
\textsuperscript{374} Elisabeth had married William Parr by January 1548, as suggested in chapter 2 and contextualized below.
\textsuperscript{375} Hamilton, 276-7.
Although no evidence seems extant that Elisabeth Cobham’s position as a gentlewoman of the privy chamber to Katherine Parr drew her directly into the political and religious wrangling of the latter Henrician years, there is no doubt that she would have been present through some of the key religious and political developments of the mid-1540s. What she witnessed and learnt of the behaviour of Katherine Parr and her associates undoubtedly shaped Elisabeth’s attitude to and use of networks to build up and utilize her influence at the Edwardian and Elizabethan courts. Aside from a mode of behaviour, arguably the most important legacy of Elisabeth’s time as part of Katherine Parr’s household was the people with whom she associated. These included her future husband and the great ladies of Katherine’s court, as well as Lady Jane Grey and Princess Elizabeth, in addition to others including, for example, the Parr kinship connections such as the Herbersts and the Throckmorton, and fellow members of Katherine’s household such as Lady Elizabeth Browne (née Fitzgerald, later Clinton) and Mistress Skipwith who both appear on Elisabeth’s paraphernalia bequest of 1565.

For the majority of Edward’s reign Elisabeth was married to William Parr and held the rank of marchioness of Northampton - the degree to which she was legally entitled to this rank and was recognised as such will be discussed below. How Elisabeth embodied the role of a marchioness is directly related to the agency, reputation and, ultimately, downfall of the women who preceded her, both prior to and following the death of Henry VIII and accession of Edward VI. Between c.1547 and 1549, the most powerful women in England were the dowager Queen, Katherine Parr and the lord protector’s wife, Anne Seymour. By March 1550 - the date of the earliest surviving document indisputably recognizing Elisabeth as Parr’s wife - Katherine Parr was dead and Anne Seymour had suffered with her husband when he was removed from power in 1549. Jane Dudley, countess of Warwick (duchess of Northumberland from October 1551 and wife of Lord President Dudley), appears to have been reluctant to take on a public role within the court. In 1548 Jane was suffering from severe ill-health and she later said of herself ‘I have not

376 For more on the religious convictions of Katherine Parr and her household, and the impact that this had on the religio-politics of the latter Henrician era see, for example, James, *Catherine Parr*, 157-226 and Starkey, *Six Wives*, 726-50.
377 CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of EPMoN, 31 March 1565.
378 The chronology of the Parrs’ marriage can be divined from the Privy Council’s reaction to their marriage (PC2/2 f. 274, Commission to investigate the marriage, 31 January 1548); the first document recognizing EP as MoN (CPR I, Edward VI pt. 1 [roll 799] vol. 3 [1549-1551], 6 March 1550) and the passing of the Northampton Divorce Act, 1552.
379 The Marquess, and crucially the marchioness of Northampton were granted a license to eat meat in Lent, 6 March 1550 - CPR I, Edward VI pt. 1 [roll 799] vol. 3 [1549-1551]. Anne Seymour was arrested alongside her husband in 1549, although only held in the Tower very briefly. Skidmore, 210.
lived to be very bold before women, much more should I loth to come into the hands of any living man." As a marchioness, Elisabeth was one of the highest ranking ladies in England, but far from the highest. She was outranked by the two non-Royal duchesses, Anne Seymour, duchess of Somerset and Katherine Brandon, dowager duchess of Suffolk, but neither lady played a significant role at the court of Edward VI after the Lord Protector’s demotion c. October 1549. Elisabeth was also preceded by the ladies of the Royal family - the princesses Mary and Elizabeth, their cousin, Margaret Douglas, countess of Lennox; Frances Brandon, marchioness of Dorset (duchess of Suffolk from 1551) and Frances’s daughters, the Ladies Jane, Catherine and Mary Grey. Despite her position in the order of precedence, however, the evidence of Elisabeth’s activity and political engagement across the years c. 1550-1553 highlight that she participated in court affairs as a diplomatic and court hostess, as well as acting as a petitioner and suitor for friends and family in addition to potentially seeking to underpin her suitability for a public role through a literary commission.

Elisabeth’s enjoyment of her position as a socio-politically significant lady at the Edwardian court is attested by events such as the wedding celebrations of the Somersets’ daughter, Anne Seymour and the Warwicks’ son and heir, John in 1550, in which Elisabeth had a prominent position. At this banquet she received a gift from the host, the Vidame de Chartres, the French ambassador, of considerably higher value than those presented to the other women present. From the Vidame Elisabeth received an enameled chain worth 200 crowns (according to the watching Spanish ambassador) and all the other ladies present including the bride, received gifts ‘according to her station’. The value of the other ladies’ gifts is not recorded but the implication is that they were all of lesser value than Elisabeth’s chain, and that the presentation of an expensive gift to the newly instated marchioness along with her presence at the banquet and extensive conversation with the French ambassador were seen as noteworthy by Van der Delft and worthy of record in his dispatches. Elisabeth spoke at length with the French ambassador, to the extent that the Spanish ambassador considered it worthy of inclusion in his dispatch. This banquet is the earliest example of Elisabeth engaging in activity that could have international political

---

380 According to her husband ‘she lokyd ol[vp]ly to have her legge to be sawed of’, SP 10/4 f. 60 (stamped 60), JDEoW to WC, 16 July 1548; PROB 11/37/0 f.274 c. 1554/5, Will of JDDuN.
381 Katherine Brandon did not have a role that could connect her to the court after Katherine Parr’s death. Anne Seymour’s reputation and position were severely damaged after the coup against her husband: Guy, Tudor England, 210-15; Alford, Kingship and Politics, 115-16, 137-8.
382 CSP Span. 1550-1552 110, JS to CV, 17 June 1550. [Original in French and ciphered].
383 Ibid.
consequences, by virtue of her association with a resident foreign ambassador. It is possible that her association with the Vidame continued until the end of Edward’s reign as her accounts for 1553 include a payment of £5 for ‘thambassadors Newe yeres gyfte’, the recipient of which could have been the French ambassador.\(^{384}\) Alternatively, this might indicate that Elisabeth enjoyed a friendship with another of the ambassadors resident at Edward’s court, in a similar manner to the behaviour she exhibited during the reign of Elizabeth.\(^{385}\) It is nowhere recorded whether Anne Seymour or Jane Dudley were present at the banquet in June 1550, even though it was to celebrate the marriage of the former’s eldest daughter to the latter’s eldest son and heir. Whether or not Anne Seymour was there, however, the inclusion of a lengthy description of Elisabeth Parr’s activity in place of Anne’s might suggest that Anne’s political influence had dissipated by this time, even though Edward Seymour was once more received at court. Elisabeth performed a similarly publically prominent and diplomatically significant role when she and William Parr hosted Marie de Guise at Hampton Court in 1551. Although the royal ladies Frances Grey, marchioness of Dorset, her daughter, Jane, and Margaret Douglas were present for elements of the dowager Queen/regent of Scotland’s visit, Elisabeth Parr was designated the host, in conjunction with her husband.\(^{386}\) Habsburg ambassador, Schefyve reported to Charles V that public opinion was that the extensive entertainments laid on for Marie de Guise were ‘done rather to please the King of France than for any other reason.’\(^{387}\) If this were so, the choice of the Parrs as the key hosts was both logical and significant as William Parr had gone on a special embassy to France earlier in 1551 and Elisabeth’s affinity with the resident French embassy in England had been demonstrated in 1550.\(^{388}\)

At the court of Edward VI, then, Elisabeth occupied a publicly prominent position appropriate to her rank and status as marchioness and wife of a member of the Protectorate, and sometime uncle of the King. This recognised status led to Elisabeth’s favour being sought by those beyond the immediate circle of the court. Being chosen to act as godmother to the son and heir of Sir William and Lady Elizabeth Cavendish in

\(^{384}\) TNA E101/520/9, f. 10.

\(^{385}\) Elisabeth was an important contact of both the Swedish and Habsburg ambassadors resident at the court of Elizabeth Tudor, c. 1561-65 as raised in chapter 2 and discussed fully and contextualised in chapter 5.

\(^{386}\) CSP Span. 1550-1552, JS to CV, 26 October 1551; APC, Edward VI, October 1551 [397]; CSP Foreign Edward VI, 477; Chronicle of Edward, 92, 94; APC, 2 November 1551, 406.

\(^{387}\) CSP Span., 1550-1552, Advice from JS, 16 November 1551.

December 1551 indicates her wider recognition by this astute and socially mobile couple. The choice of Elisabeth along with the newly ennobled William Paulet and William Herbert (Elisabeth’s brother-in-law) confirms that the Cavendishes were seeking for their son the possibility of advancement at court through his association with significant Edwardian courtiers. From around 1551, the Cavendishes were also kin to Elisabeth by virtue of her brother, Thomas’s marriage to Katherine, William Cavendish’s daughter from his first marriage and this kinship connection could also have been a reason why the Cavendishes sought Elisabeth’s favour for their son.

As marchioness of Northampton, Elisabeth was in a position from which she could usefully help her family through patronage and preferment. As an example, Elisabeth acted for her brother, William Cobham, trying to secure him property in Blackfriars from William More, an employee of her husband. In 1545, Elisabeth and William’s father held part of a tenement in Blackfriars, and Edward Seymour requested of Sir Thomas Cawarden (in October 1547) that his ‘loving friend’ Lord Cobham might ‘occupy the hall of his property’ whilst he took up his position in parliament. Cawarden and William More were close associates and allies from the 1540s onwards. It seems plausible that they shared interests in property, and that the partial property allotted to Lord Cobham might be that in which his son had an interest, with Elisabeth Parr taking over the role of petitioner occupied by Edward Seymour prior to his fall from grace. The Parrs themselves had property in Blackfriars. Elisabeth wrote to William More, later her husband’s deputy when Parr was Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, echoing Seymour’s rhetoric of friendship. Requesting for William the whole house for his own use, Elisabeth proclaimed that she had great cause to thank More for the friendship he had already shown to her brother, the bearer of the letter, but asked that ‘good More’ show ‘your forder fryndshyp’ by giving him the house, which she would ‘take thys plesuer as done to my selfe.’ The letter, signed ‘your assured frend E Northampton’ is one of the two letters written by Elisabeth to survive from the Edwardian years. The other Edwardian letter is also a holograph written by Elisabeth to William More but in this case Elisabeth’s request concerned a loan of £50

389 Collins, _Historical Collections of the Noble Families of Cavendish_ (Withers, 1752); Lovell, 72.
390 Sybil M. Jack, ‘Cavendish, Sir William (1508–1557)’, ODNB.
391 Durant, 24; _Cobham Chronicle_, f.35
392 SHC S/407/Lb.455; Folger Loseley MS, EPMoN to WM, [c.1551?].
393 SHC S/407/Lb.273; Folger Loseley MS, EDoS to Thomas Cawarden, 1543.
394 James, _Kateryn Parr_, 14–7.
395 SHC S/407/Lb.559; Folger Loseley MS, EPMoN to WM, [c.1551?].
for herself. The letter, written without opening salutation and with no direction is described by James Daybell as ‘exemplary of the kind of terse confidence with which an aristocratic woman might write to a functionary.’ The tone of Elisabeth’s letter requesting financial assistance from More is more direct than that requesting a favour for her brother, but both letters are couched in personal terms of friendship, promising reciprocity of any favour done in addition to the author’s gratitude. That Elisabeth sent her letter requesting favour for her brother, William with either him or another brother adds a further layer of personal pressure to the letter, as a refusal of the marchioness’ request would be an affront to the bearer himself. This seems in some ways to sit at odds with Daybell’s assertion that (citing the advice of Castiglione and Francis Bacon) in practice a person could express certain matters more easily on someone else’s behalf than their own as William was effectively confronting More. In the case of either letter written by Elisabeth Northampton to More, however, although Elisabeth observed the cultural requirements of a request letter, with the lack of room for More to refuse either request confirming that her gender was less important in terms of the tone of letters than was her rank and position relative to More’s own. This is indicative of the ‘high degree of confidence’ with which a woman such as Elisabeth, as a marchioness, was able to conduct business for herself and her associates. Elisabeth’s use of epistolary stylistics rooted in Senecan language of favour and politicized friendships also, according to Daybell, suggests some knowledge of epistolary conventions either drawn from early modern letter-writing manuals encountered through formal tuition or from familiarity with composition, structure and style of early modern letters through regular contact as ‘letters, letter-writing and the deployment of rhetoric were central to the trade of courtiership’. It is impossible to tell which of the letters is the earlier as neither is dated, however, it seems likely that the letter requesting a loan which will be repaid by Easter was written while Elisabeth was resident at Esher in Surrey in the spring and summer of 1551, during which time William Parr was on embassy in France. Elisabeth’s family, including her brother, William, made use of her elevated position by using their kinship with William Parr for their own

396 SHC S/407/Lb.455; Folger Loseley MS, EPMoN to WM, [c.1551?].
397 Daybell, Women Letter-Writers, 249.
399 Daybell, ‘Women’s letters of recommendation’, 188.
400 Ibid.
401 Travails and life, 74-5. Examination of the material letter reveals that it was sealed with stitches rather than a wax seal, possibly indicating informality between correspondents, but also a degree of sensitivity in the subject matter. The lack of direction for the letter also seems to suggest proximity between sender and recipient, which would match the urgency of Elisabeth’s need. With thanks to Dr Daniel Starza Smith for the examination and images of this letter in the Folger Shakespeare Library. See fig. 3, 85.
advancement. William and Thomas Cobham accompanied Parr on his embassy to France in 1551 as members of his household, and both brothers spent time with the Parrs in Southwark in at least 1553.\(^{402}\) George Brooke, Lord Cobham served on the Henrician Privy Council with Parr, but no evidence survives that suggests a particularly strong personal relationship. In 1546 William Parr does seem to have been acting to secure a favour for Lady Cobham, as John Wilkins, the Cobhams’ steward, informed Lady Cobham in a postscript, ‘I delivered my lord Marquis your ring and he promised to do his best to content you at your coming into England.’\(^{403}\) Lady Cobham’s use of Parr, then the Queen’s brother, as an intermediary in a suit suggests a degree of familiarity with the man who was her future son-in-law and had previously been her sister’s lover, but potentially supports the ‘mother’ of the maids of honour, Mistress Stoner’s comment that there was nothing improper about Elisabeth’s behaviour.\(^{404}\) Interestingly, although no evidence seems extant that refers to Elisabeth by the title marchioness of Northampton before 1550, the Northamptons’ marriage does seem to have been accepted before that date by her family. A letter from William Parr to Lord Cobham from January 1549 highlights that Parr was acting for Lord Cobham at Edward VI’s court, while Cobham was in post as Deputy of Calais. Parr records that Cobham’s earlier letters to him required him to ‘remember [Cobham] in certain things wherein I did fully’. Crucially, Parr acknowledges that a further message reached him by his ‘brother Cobham’ (probably William), which suggests both that William Cobham may have been attendant on Parr since at least 1549, and that Parr acknowledged Cobham as his brother, or rather brother-in-law, signifying the continuance of his relationship with Elisabeth.\(^{405}\)

Once recognised as marchioness of Northampton with a position close to the court, Elisabeth was potentially able - and more importantly seen as being able - to influence court affairs and bestow favour and patronage. Her household became a destination for young noblewomen who served as her attendants and took advantage of the proximity to the court her situation offered. A record of the Parrs’ household from 1553 details six gentlewomen attendant on Elisabeth, mistresses Bray, Newton, Coverde, Cornwallis, Hussey and Strange.\(^{406}\) Mistress Bray is almost certainly a relative of Elisabeth’s as her

---

\(^{402}\) Travails and life, 94-5; TNA E101/520/9 and E154/2/45.  
\(^{403}\) BL Harley MS 283 f. 177, John Wilkins to GBLC, 15 March 1546.  
\(^{404}\) BL Harley MS 283 f. 176, John Wilkins to GBLC, 30 November 1545. Or, alternatively, that the Cobhams were accepting of Elisabeth’s relationship, but this seems unlikely.  
\(^{405}\) BL Harley MS 284 f. 60, WPMoN to GBLC, 24 January 1549.  
\(^{406}\) TNA E154/2/45 and TNA E154/2/39, Inventories of the Parrs’ property taken from Essex, 1553-4, also listing their complete household.
mother was Anne née Bray. Elisabeth’s uncle John Bray married Anne Talbot, daughter of Francis, fifth earl of Shrewsbury, and Anne’s brother, George the sixth earl would marry Elisabeth’s friend and associate, Elizabeth Cavendish as her fourth husband in 1568. There is no record of John and Anne Bray having children, but it is possible that the mistress Bray is an unknown daughter of theirs. Elisabeth recognised Anne Talbot in her paraphernalia bequests in 1565, suggesting that they remained in contact through the court, despite Elisabeth’s uncle having died in 1557. Mistress Bray could possibly have been one of Elisabeth’s young aunts - at least one of her mother’s sisters was younger than Elisabeth. One, Dorothy, had been William Parr’s mistress prior to his involvement with Elisabeth. Mistress Newton is either Jane or Frances Newton as from 1559 Frances was Elisabeth’s sister-in-law through her marriage to William Cobham and both she and Jane were associates of Elisabeth’s in 1565.

No positive identification can be found for mistress Coverde (no-one of this name or variant spellings is listed in the ODNB), but the other three belong to recognisable noble families of mid-Tudor England. Mistress Cornwallis was probably the daughter but possibly the sister of Sir Thomas Cornwallis, who married Anne Jerningham, Elisabeth’s eventual sister-in-law through Anne’s brother John’s marriage to Elisabeth’s younger sister Catherine. Thomas Cornwallis had aided William Parr against Kett’s army in Norwich during the rebellion of summer 1549, and held posts at the courts of Henry VIII and

407 Durant, 54-6; Daybell, Women Letter-Writers, 194.
408 CP 3/69-71.
409 Mckeen, 7. Elisabeth’s uncle, John Bray was the ninth child of her grandparents Sir Edmund and Lady Jane Bray. At the time of his birth, Anne Brooke née Bray had given birth to two possibly three of her children, Elisabeth and her brothers William and Henry. John died of his wounds after the battle of St. Quentin in 1557 and his mother, eldest sister and brother-in-law all died in the influenza epidemic of 1558 leaving William Brooke, then Lord Cobham to inherit the bulk of his uncle’s estate. See also the Wills of Lady Anne Cobham, CP 198/110 and her father, Edmund Bray, dated 18 October 1539 and proved 12 March 1541, TNA PROB 11/28/429. A letter written by the Cobham’s steward, John Wilkins to Lady Cobham then resident in Calais highlights that Wilkins delivered ‘my lady Braye’s letter’ to a servant of her and left ‘lady Breges letter’ with someone else. Dorothy Bray married Edmund Brydges, Baron Chandos c. 1544/5 and their daughter, Eleanor was born c.1546 so this letter suggests perhaps that another Bray sister was now at court and it could have been she who later had a place in Elisabeth’s household. BL Harley MS 283 f. 177, John Wilkins to ABLC, 15 March 1546.
410 At his trial for adultery with Queen Catherine Howard Thomas Culpeper cited Dorothy Bray’s adultery with William Parr, then Lord Parr of Kendal, as justification for his innocence in his relationship with the Queen. According to Culpeper, Katherine told him ‘If I listed I could bring you into as good a trade as Bray hath my Lord Parr in’, to which Culpeper replied he thought her ‘no such woman as Bray.’ The Trial of Thomas Culpeper and Catherine Howard, SP 1/167 ff. 158-9 cited by Starkey, Six Wives, 678-9.
411 Both women were beneficiaries of Elisabeth’s possessions, as per CP 3/69-71. In addition, an alternative indentification of the sitters in the 1567 Cobham family portrait has Frances, Lady Cobham painted alongside her sister, Jane, who was then living at Cobham Hall. Mckeen, 412 Thomas Cornwallis was also a cousin by marriage of Elizabeth Jerningham, cousin of his wife Anne, so cousin-in-law of Catherine Cobham. John Bernard Burke, A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire (London: Colburn, 1852), 244.
Edward VI. He was also kin to the Parrs through the Throckmortons. Mistress Hussey was most likely one of the five daughters of John Hussey, Baron Hussey and his second wife Anne née Grey, daughter of the earl of Kent. Hussey had been a courtier to Henry VIII and attendant to Princess Mary, before his involvement in the Pilgrimage of Grace led to his execution in 1536.Lady Anne Hussey also served in Mary’s household and continued to do so once she became Queen. Bridget Hussey became countess of Rutland after she married Henry Manners, earl of Rutland as his second wife following the death of Margaret Neville - the countess of Rutland to whom Elizaboth sent a christening cup and paid for a midwife for the birth of her child in 1553 according to her account book. It is intriquing to speculate whether the earl could have met his future wife in the Parrs’ household.

Mistress Strange is harder to identify as Strange as a surname does not appear in the records. Le Strange or Lestrange, however, is a likely alternative form. Mistress Strange could have been one of the five daughters - Elizabeth, Anne, Katherine, Alice and Mary - born to Sir Thomas Le Strange (1494-1545) and Anne née Vaux (c.1497-post. 1548). Anne’s mother, Elizabeth née Fitzhugh married first William Parr, Baron Parr of Kendal, making her the grandmother of Queen Katherine Parr, Anne Herbert, countess of Pembroke and William Parr, marquess of Northampton through her son, Thomas Parr. After William Parr of Kendal’s death Elizabeth married Nicholas Vaux, Baron of Harrowden, and through her daughter Katherine she was also the grandmother of Nicholas Throckmorton, celebrated Elizabethan diplomat. Elsewhere in this thesis it is argued that Nicholas Throckmorton used his kinship with the Parrs to his advantage at the courts of Katherine Parr and Elizabeth Tudor. It seems logical, then, that a Mistress

414 As below, William and Katherine Parr shared a grandmother, Elizabeth née Fitzhugh, with Nicholas Throckmorton, who could also claim kinship to the Cornwallises though his wife, Anne née Carew. Mueller, 44; James, Catherine Parr, 40 and Karen Robertson, ‘Tracing Women’s Connections from a Letter by Elizabeth Ralegh’, 149-64 in Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England: Women’s Alliances in Early Modern England eds. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 158.
415 Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 55-6; Guy, Tudor England, 151-2 and R. W. Hoyle, ‘Hussey, John, Baron Hussey (1465/6–1537)’, ODNB.
416 Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 65-6, 78 and TNA E101/520/9, Money received and desrayed by occasion of the affairs of the Marquiss of Northampton. Another mistress Hussey - Elizabeth - married Robert Throckmorton, Nicholas’s eldest brother, further strengthening this kinship network.
417 L. L. Ford, ‘Vaux, Nicholas, first Baron Vaux (c.1460–1523)’, ODNB and Rosemary Horrox, ‘Parr family (per. c.1370–1517)’, ODNB and as above.
418 As above, and Mueller, 44; James, Catherine Parr, 40 and Robertson, 158.
Lestrange would find a place in the households of so prominent a second cousin as William Parr, marquess of Northampton as attendant to his wife. Barbara Harris comments that

When members of the upper classes placed their children in the homes of their kinfolk, friends, and patrons, they were consciously doing so to strengthen their own networks and to perpetuate them into the next generation. \(^{419}\)

When the connections between the identifiable members of Elisabeth’s attendant household are articulated it is clear that they represented a particular generation of an extended kinship network that encompassed both Elisabeth and William’s extended families. Elisabeth’s household emerges as a destination for well-born young girls who sought, or had parents who sought, advantage at court, and suggests the marchioness of Northampton’s centrality in a network of female influence. \(^{420}\)

The survival of the Parrs’ account book from the Spring and Summer of 1553 is a rich source for reconstructing the way in which Elisabeth lived as a marchioness as it reveals details of all aspects of her life and activity. The political significance of Elisabeth’s social activity across 1553 raised in chapter 2 will be explored below. Of interest here is how a reconstruction of Elisabeth’s spending habits in 1553 highlight a degree of her self-presentation at the queenless Edwardian court. Vast sums of money were spent on fabric and clothes stuffs, as well as skilled craftsmen to prepare garments for the marchioness. Across this period Elisabeth spent upwards of £80. \(^{421}\) To put this in context, the annual salary for a lady of the Queen’s bedchamber was £20, or £33 6s 8d for a lady of the privy chamber. \(^{422}\) Between 1 February and 3 July 1553 Elisabeth purchased or had made ‘neckerches and ruffes of golde’; ‘a petticote of Cremson growgrayne and velvet’; ‘parple velvet vii yards at cl s the yarde’; taffatie and gold and gold ffrenge; as well as a payment ‘To William Crowder mercer the xxxth of marche for viii yardes iij garters of velvet at xxij s viij d the yarde for agowne for my Ladie and other necessaries ix li xvij s’. She also paid Edward Jones the tailor nearly £8 ‘upon a bill for makeng certen apparell’ for her and £2 10s for ‘buttons and dyvers other necessaries’ for said apparel. Elisabeth spent 4s on fringe for a pair of sleeves in May 1553, and according to Hayward, across the period, sleeves were becoming increasingly important as a vehicle for decoration among the elite. \(^{423}\) A

---

\(^{419}\) Harris, *Aristocratic Women*, 264.

\(^{420}\) The Cobham/Parr kinship networks are very complicated to explain textually therefore all significant connections have been visually represented in diagrams in Appendix C, figs. a and b.

\(^{421}\) £85 5s 11p - Something approaching £16,235 in 2005, according to the National Archives’ currency converter.

\(^{422}\) Merton, ‘The women who served’, 13 citing BL Lansdowne MS 3 f. 88.

‘peece woman’ received six shillings ‘by my ladyes comanndment’ - possibly even for decorative sleeves, and ‘Davie Smyth thymbraderer’ received £20 for unspecified work. From her accession in 1558, Queen Elizabeth Tudor employed David Smith as one of her household embroiderers - it is interesting to speculate whether he came to the Parrs from Katherine Parr’s royal household and then returned to royal service, or whether perhaps Elisabeth Parr recommended the craftsman to her friend the Queen.\footnote{John Gough Nichols, \textit{Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, Volume V - Appendices, Bibliographies, and Index} eds. Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Clarke, Elizabeth Goldring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 252, taken from BL Harley Roll AA.23 - Queen Elizabeth’s Privy Purse Expenses, written by John Tamworth, 1559-1569.}

Clothing was an obvious identifier of wealth and status, so Elisabeth’s attention to her clothing and jewellery suggests much of her own ideas of her status. In her work on the clothing laws of Henry VIII’s England Maria Hayward remarked that the Henrician acts of apparel were ‘highly gendered’, as ‘they were intended to establish and reinforce the male hierarchy.’\footnote{Hayward, 45.} This reinforcement of male hierarchy was due to the fact that men held public office, so could use their clothing to assert a public identity and make highly visible statements. According to Hayward, ‘the lack of concern with female dress meant that their clothing was free from state regulation. As such, monitoring the clothes of women and children was considered to be a domestic matter and so left to their husbands and fathers.’\footnote{Ibid.} As a marquess, William Parr was entitled to wear ‘cloth of gold of tissue, except in doublets and sleeveless coats, costing more than £5 a yard’ as well as ‘imported wool except in bonnets, velvet of crimson, scarlet or blue, on his body; horse or horse harness and black genette or lynx.’\footnote{The 1533 Act of Apparel, cited by Hayward, 29. This was a departure from the 1515 Act which allowed ‘cloth of gold of tissue, regardless of whether it is used in combination with another fabric, used as a guard or embroidery, on his body, horse or horse harness and sable’.} Elisabeth’s wardrobe was clearly full of expensive silks, taffeta and velvet, crimson and purples, heavily embroidered and embellished, even including gold tissue. She dressed to match her status, and her tastes in clothes and jewellery suggest that she consciously clothed herself as befitted a noblewoman in a manner that would set her apart from her household, and any visiting family of lower rank or status.

Far from regulating Elisabeth’s apparel, the account book suggests that William Parr was keen for his wife to be accoutred equivalently to himself, together making a public statement of wealth and power.\footnote{William Parr spent £100 on a ring, TNA E101/520/9 f. 9.} Parr himself contributed to Elisabeth’s material wealth
in this period, gifting her with a cupboard full of plate costing £116 for New Year. This cupboard sits alongside other purchases totalling £25 12s 4p for a tablet, ounces of working and purled gold, and old gold to make pearls. As well as the sheer expense of the New Year’s gift, however, the goldsmith from whom Parr made his purchase is significant. The goldsmith was Peter Richardson, who had been Katherine Parr’s preferred goldsmith when Queen. Susan James speculates that Richardson made the identifiable ship jewel that Katherine Parr wears in one of her portraits, previously owned by Catherine Howard and later by Queen Elizabeth, a copy of which Elisabeth wears in the Cobham family portrait. James suggests that Richardson might have followed Elisabeth and William Parr after Katherine Parr’s death. Richardson the goldsmith, and David Smith the embroiderer mentioned above, suggest a tantalising link between Elisabeth Parr and her late sister-in-law, materially connecting the women through their use of jewellery and clothing to project an outward image. The socio-political links between Katherine and Elisabeth will be explored below but what the presence in Elisabeth’s household accounts of two of Katherine’s favour craftsmen seems to confirm is that just as Elisabeth’s household was a destination for the six young gentlewomen sent to attend on her and learn the art of a female courtier and noblewoman, Elisabeth herself had learnt those lessons from Katherine Parr during her time in her household, c. 1543-48.

The other information detailed in the account book allows a reconstruction of how the Parrs and their household functioned while they were resident at Winchester Palace in Southwark in the spring of 1553, allowing a brief sketch of some of their socio-political circle. As mentioned above, Elisabeth paid 13s 4p to the nurse and 10s to the midwife at the christening of a Mistress Vaughan’s child. The child itself received a christening cup weighing 18oz. The countess of Rutland’s wetnurse was given a reward of 10s too, perhaps suggesting that Elisabeth was godmother to the baby, most likely Elizabeth Manners, daughter of Henry Manners, earl of Rutland and his wife Margaret, née Neville, born 1553. Margaret was the sister of Henry Neville, earl of Westmorland, whose ‘syngeng

---

429 TNA E101/520/9 f. 10.
430 Ibid. ff. 7-11.
431 James and van der Stighelen, 66-101. See fig. 5, 87. The identity of the sitter in the Cobham family portrait is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.
432 TNA E101/520/9 f. 7v. I would speculate that Mistress Vaughan was Elizabeth née Roydon, who married Cuthbert Vaughan c. 1550 and may have had a daughter, Jane, born c. 1553. Both Roydon and Vaughan had property in Kent which might have connected them to the Cobham family and their landholdings, and so to Elisabeth’s household. Alternatively she could be a relative of the Cobham’s tutor and later MP Stephen Vaughan.
men’ were paid 20s for entertaining the household. Across this season the Parrs were also entertained by William Parr’s ‘players’, and paid 40s for bulls and bears. Both the marchioness and marquess were keen - albeit seemingly not particularly skilled - card players as across the season they record substantial debts - Elisabeth lost 80s when playing glee with Robert Dudley and Sir James Croft, Lord Deputy of Ireland. William Parr also owed £25 for repeated losses at tennis. Elisabeth also paid out rewards to several of her ladies - notably mistress Bray, who received 20s on one occasion and a piece of gold on another - as well as reimbursing them for money they had laid out on her behalf. The Parrs also received gifts of pheasant and partridge and gave gifts in return. Taken together, then, the Parrs account book is a very valuable source of information as to how this noble couple conducted themselves at one of their residences across a five month period in 1553. Elisabeth associated with a number of other women from across the ranks of the gentry and nobility, and participated in the accepted and expected rituals of entertainments, reciprocal gift giving and hosting that was part of the role of a noblewoman operating at and around the Tudor court. By the summer of 1553, the end of the reign of Edward VI, Elisabeth had established herself in the role of marchioness of Northampton and was fully engaged in and inhabiting the role of a socio-politically aware and active female courtier.

Female courtiers in context during the reign of Edward VI

So far this chapter has established the extent to which Elisabeth conducted herself and was recognised as a socio-politically important member of the Edwardian court and nobility by presenting the way in which she was surrounded and surrounded herself with kin and associates and consciously inhabited her position. This section presents the circumstances of women during the reign of Edward VI, that is the effect that the absence of a queen consort had on the women who would usually form her household. Under Henry VIII the court comprised the King, his privy council and courtiers and the rest of his household, and a Queen consort with courtiers and a supporting household of her own. The reasons for the court restructure necessitated by Edward’s minority were twofold. First, as proposed by Henry VIII’s will the privy council was subsumed within the

---

433 TNA E101/520/9 f. 8.
434 Ibid. ff. 7, 9.
435 The only times that this was not the case was when there was no Queen consort for a significant period, as between the death of Jane Seymour in October 1537 and Henry’s marriage to Anne of Cleves in July 1540, and between the execution of Catherine Howard in February 1542 and Henry’s marriage to Katherine Parr in July 1543. For more on the restructuring of the court under Henry see Starkey, ‘The King’s Privy Chamber’ and Loades, The Tudor Court, 38-53.
protectorate council. Secondly, the absence of a Queen consort or royal woman removed the formalised accompanying household of the consort’s privy chamber attendants and other female courtiers. Without employment as attendants (waged or unwaged/honorary), which allowed them lodging and provided occupation, there were officially no women resident at court. This by no means signifies that women were not there, nor that they were not important; rather that they operated from a less formal, unstructured position.

Prior to Elisabeth’s recognition as marchioness of Northampton in 1550 the key noblewomen at and around the court during Edward’s reign were Katherine Parr, Katherine Brandon, Anne Seymour and Jane Dudley, and the activity of these noblewomen had an impact upon the structure and functioning of the court itself. Katherine Brandon, widowed duchess of Suffolk, Anne Seymour, then countess of Hertford and Jane Dudley, countess of Warwick, had all served as noble attendants to Katherine Parr when she was Henry VIII’s sixth Queen consort. Evidence of their religious persuasions and wider activity suggests they were also friends and allies; like-minded women who shared the Queen’s interest in reformed religion. From at least 1543 Elisabeth was part of this circle. Elisabeth had served as a gentlewoman of the privy chamber to Katherine Parr during the entirety of her Queenship, continuing in her dower household after the death of Henry VIII, during Katherine’s fourth marriage to Thomas Seymour. From the tone of letters that survive from Katherine Brandon and her husband to Elisabeth’s father, Elisabeth was also well acquainted with the duchess of Suffolk in the mid-1540s. After Henry VIII’s death, Edward Seymour was promoted to duke of Somerset and made lord protector of England, and William Parr was promoted from earl of Essex to marquess of Northampton and made a member of the protectorate council, as was John Dudley, earl of Warwick. Thomas Seymour, the protector’s brother was made Baron Sudeley and also a member of

---

436 Henry VIII’s reasons for establishing a protectorate instead of a regency for his son’s minority are well documented, as are the personal rivalries that lead to the collapse of the protectorate c. 1549/1550. TNA PRO Royal Wills, E, 23 v. 14 pt. 1 ff. 1-17; printed in LP, 1546-7, v. xxi, pt. 2, 713. See also E. W. Ives, ‘Henry VIII’s will: the protectorate provisions of 1546-7’, The Historical Journal, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Dec. 1994), 901-14.

437 TNA E179/69/41, f. 1, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1543-4; TNA E179/69/48, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1544-5; TNA E179/69/47, f. 62, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1545-6; TNA E179/69/55, D1, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1545-6; TNA E179/69/44, Subsidy list for the household of KP, 1546-7.

438 Ibid.

439 TNA E101/426/2, ff. 1-5, Wage list for Katherine Parr’s dower household, 1547.

440 BL Harley MS 283, f. 157 is a very friendly letter from Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk to GBLC with a holograph postscript from Katherine. This is also attested by their mutual service to Katherine Parr already demonstrated and John Wilkin’s 1545 letter detailing Elisabeth’s association with the Queen, Princess Mary and Katherine Brandon, duchess of Suffolk that is BL Harley MS 283, f. 176.
the council, although of significantly less importance than his brother.\textsuperscript{441} The women’s roles and circumstances correspondingly altered. Katherine Parr, who might have been expecting to be made regent for Edward VI (as she had been for Henry VIII when he was on campaign against the French in 1544) was given no official role.\textsuperscript{442} As dowager Queen Katherine was required to leave the court, and assume residence at one of her dower properties. Katherine Brandon also lost her place at court. As a widow she had no male counterpart to serve as part of the protectorate and her sons were minors; she divided her time between Katherine Parr’s dower household and her own estates.\textsuperscript{443} Anne Seymour and Jane Dudley’s circumstances were reversed - with their husbands taking significant roles in the government of the realm and representing the young King during his minority, the newly promoted duchess of Somerset became quasi-consort of England, with Jane, countess of Warwick’s significance similarly increased.\textsuperscript{444}

Barbara Harris has shown that ‘the activities of women with offices in the royal household constituted careers in the fullest sense of the word’ and that their participation in and presence at court were essential for the ‘court to perform its central social, ceremonial, political, and diplomatic functions.’\textsuperscript{445} This remained true even when the lack of a queen consort removed the women’s official roles in the household. The removal of the women from the royal household officially, may have contributed to a degree of restructuring that resulted in a partial removal of court politics and governance from the court (meaning the current residence of the King) to rival establishments - the residences of the protectorate and their wives and that of the dowager Queen. When not resident at the court with their husbands - as when they were required to perform a social and ceremonial function - evidence suggests that the wives of the protectorate lived in their nearest private residence to the King’s current residence, and travelled accordingly when he moved. The Tudor monarch was essentially itinerant and wherever the King went, his council also had to go, or at least needed to be nearby and during the reign of Edward VI the wives of the protectorate also travelled, following and encircling the court as satellites.

\textsuperscript{442} James, \textit{Catherine Parr}, 138-56 and 255-60.
\textsuperscript{443} KBDuS’s correspondence with William Cecil across this period highlights that she was moving between her various residences including Kingston, Tattershal and Grimsthorpe Castles in Lincolnshire. See SP 10/10 f. 3 (stamped 4), KBDuS to WC, 25 March 1549; SP 10/10 f. 9 (stamped 10), KBDuS to WC, 9 May 1549; SP 10/8 f. 60, KBDuS to WC, 24 July 1549; SP 10/10 f. 55 (stamped 55), KBDuS to WC, 8 August 1549 and BL Lansdowne 2, f. 39, KBDuS to WC, 28 August 1549. See also Melissa Franklin-Harkrider, \textit{Women, Reform and Community in Early Modern England: Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, and Lincolnshire’s Godly Aristocracy, 1519-1580} (London: Boydell, 2008).
\textsuperscript{444} See Warnicke, \textit{Wicked Women}, 88-95; Alford, \textit{Kingship and Politics}, 68-70.
\textsuperscript{445} Harris, \textit{Aristocratic Women}, 211.
When the King was in residence in central London, at Whitehall Palace, or St James, for example, Elisabeth and sometimes William Parr were probably resident in their Blackfriars property, or Winchester Palace in Southwark. When the King was at Hampton Court, however, Elisabeth Parr moved to Esher in Surrey, practically adjacent to it. During this period the Parrs also maintained at least two other residences, Easton in Essex - one of the properties associated with Parr’s earldom of Essex - and Kendal Castle, from which he drew his ancestral title, baron Kendal. The Dudleys and the Seymours too had multiple residences and divided their time between their London bases and rural properties. This was standard practice to an extent, but the increased significance of this behaviour lies in the dual pull of women not being resident at court and the monarch being a minor. Because their wives were not resident at the court and they conducted council meetings without the King, protector Somerset and Dudley as lord president sometimes held council meetings in their own residences, not at the court itself. As an example, the privy council meeting at which William and Elisabeth were separated following their illicit marriage took place in the Protector’s private residence, with ‘their grace and lordships being assembled in counsele at Somerset place besides the strand.’ John Dudley was at his own residence when after Edward Seymour was arrested in October 1549, Anne Seymour visited him by means of his wife, Jane, in order that she could petition Dudley in person for her husband’s release. Further symptomatic of the restructuring that physically took place within the court without a queen consort in residence, Protector Somerset may actually have occupied the Queen’s side of the palaces where the King was in residence. This is inferred from references to the Queen’s side of the courts after Somerset’s execution in 1552 - first, the new lord president Dudley passed an Act of the Privy Council that no one should occupy the Queen’s side, implying that previously someone - namely Edward Seymour - had done so. Secondly, King Edward recorded that Marie de Guise stayed in the Queen’s lodging, which implies that the ‘no one’ who could occupy the Queen’s side of the

---

446 James, Kateryn Parr, 15 and 17; Mueller, 5 and 9. The Parrs were granted Winchester Palace, Southwark from 1552 (although Hoby suggests they were resident there in 1551), and Parr extended the property. John Stow, A Survey of London written in the year 1598 (London, 1598); Travails and life, 74-5.
447 TNA E154/2/40, Inventorie from Westmorland, 1553; TNA E154/2/45, Inventory of the Parrs’ household and belongings taken from Essex, 1553-4 and a fair copy of the same, TNA E154/2/39. See also, Thomas Coax, Anthony Hall and Robert Morden, Magna Britannia Antiqua and Nova: Westmorland (London, 1738), 17. William Parr was created Lord Parr of Kendal in 1539, Burke, 410.
448 Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset maintained residences at Syon House and Somerset House; John Dudley, duke of Northumberland had residences at Chelsea Manor (after the death of Katherine Parr) and Durham House on the Strand. Stow, A Survey of London, 91-104.
449 PC2/2 f. 273, 31 January 1548.
450 CSP Span. 1547-1549, VdV to CV, 19 December 1549.
palace actually meant no non-royal person, like Seymour. Although the royal apartments may have been out of bounds, members of the protectorate maintained apartments at court as befitting their roles as courtiers to King Edward - although the women could not. When the court was in London, however, the men of the protectorate council resided in their own establishments with far greater regularity, or at least more extensively than had been the case in the reign of Henry VIII. The evidence of building works happening at the Protectorate’s residences supports the idea that the members of the Protectorate and Council sought to establish their residences as seats of power. Edward Seymour reputedly took stone from St Paul’s Cathedral to transform his London residence into a palace to match the regal authority he was attempting to secure for himself. William and Elisabeth Parr, too, made changes to Winchester Palace, enlarging and renovating it, establishing the Palace as a suitable base from which to exert their authority. The increasing amount of time that the protectorate spent away from the court in their own residences was compounded by the fact that their wives no longer had residences at court. By residing in their London residences, however, the women could maintain their positions at court and continue their careers to the best of their abilities. Elisabeth Parr and Anne Seymour, particularly, were able to continue their own careers by remaining in proximity to the seat(s) of power and maintaining their informal influence through sustained personal association.

Katherine Parr’s private residence merits a separate discussion. As dowager Queen Katherine’s title afforded her a degree of automatic socio-political stature and significance. To capitalise upon this she maintained an almost permanent residence at the most prominent of her dower properties, Chelsea Manor. A verse posthuminously attributed to William and Katherine Parr’s cousin Nicholas Throckmorton reported of Katherine’s residence at Chelsea that

**Her house was termed ‘a second court’ of right,**
**Because thare flockèd still, nobility.**
**He [Thomas Seymour] spared no cost his lady to delight,**

452 *APC*, At Westminstre the xxii of Octobre, 1551, 898.
454 James, *The Feminine Dynamic*, 34 and TNA E101/520/9 f. 8 shows a payment of 8s for ‘the seyling of the gallerie’. Presumably this was decoration.
455 Katherine continued to be served by a household fit for a dowager Queen as per TNA E101/426/2, ff. 1-5, Wage list for Katherine Parr’s dower household, 1547.
Or to maintain her princely royalty.\textsuperscript{456}

Katherine’s household became the most prominent seat of female political authority and engagement as her Queenly household became a more equal, and I would argue more powerful, gathering that included Princess Elizabeth, Jane Grey, and the two noblewomen who were not legitimately attached to the protectorate - Katherine Brandon and Elisabeth Cobham prior to the acceptance of her marriage to Parr. The residence maintained strong links to the court and the council through Thomas Seymour, William Parr and others such as Nicholas Throckmorton. Extant documents confirm that the women of Chelsea Manor continued in politically significant activity - Katherine Parr and Katherine Brandon helped bring about Elisabeth’s marriage to William Parr before they had the approval of the commission; Anne Herbert, countess of Pembroke acted as an intermediary in the marriage of her sister, Katherine Parr and Thomas Seymour.\textsuperscript{457} More minor courtiers and members of the noble households interacted and passed messages and information highlighting the extent of an informal network operating between Chelsea Manor, the court and other noble establishments. Katherine Brandon was involved with Katherine and William Parr in supporting a visiting Italian preacher and encouraging the publication of Katherine’s original religious work, \textit{Lamentations of a Sinner} in 1548.\textsuperscript{458} At that point in time the Parr kinship alliance was more extensive and politically effective than the Seymours’ as I will show later in this chapter. The rivalry between Katherine Parr and Anne Seymour that manifested in their competition for Katherine’s royal jewels was an acknowledgement that Katherine’s position as dowager Queen guaranteed her a political authority that Anne felt should be hers as consort to the Lord Protector.\textsuperscript{459} The women’s role reversal was compounded by Katherine’s marriage to Anne Seymour’s younger brother-in-law.


\textsuperscript{457} SP 10/1 f. 43 (stamped 132), TS to KP, [late May] 1547; Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D1070, art. 2, ff. 4-5, KP to TS, [May] 1547; the references suggest this is a later copy of Thomas’s letter of the 17 May in which he mentions dining with the Herbets. SP 10/1 f. 43 (stamped 132), TS to KP, May 1547; SP 10/1 f. 144, TS to KP, 17 May 1547, cited in Mueller, 136 and SP 46/1 f. 14, TS to KP, March 1547; \textit{CSP Span. 1547-1549}, 254, VdD to CV, 23 February 1548.

\textsuperscript{458} The title of \textit{Lamentations} claims that the work was ‘set forth and put in print at the instant desire’ of Parr and Brandon. Mueller, 425. The first edition of \textit{Lamentaciones} is Katherine Parr, \textit{The lamentacion of a sinner, made by the most virtuous Ladie, Quene Caterin} (London: Edward Whitchurd, 1547) STC 4827. See also Franklin-Harkrider, 50 and \textit{CSP Span. 1547-1549}, 254, VdD to CV, 23 February 1548.

\textsuperscript{459} See for example, SP 10/3 f. 15 (stamped 16), an account of Edward Seymour retrieving Katherine Parr’s royal jewels from King Edward’s jewel house, 20 January 1548, and William Parr’s deposition regarding Thomas Seymour, CP 150/122.
The extent to which the women of the Edwardian court were active in politics and continued their court careers has not yet been integrated into the political narrative of Edward VI’s reign. How the women continued their careers and remained politically engaged within the context outlined above can clearly be seen in their patronage and petitioning. The lack of a Queen consort meant that a rank in the patronage hierarchy was removed and the wives of the protectorate had more direct access and influence on court politics and themselves vied for the position of first lady of the Edwardian court. Elisabeth’s single most significant act during the reign of Edward VI was her instigation of Thomas Hoby’s translation of Baldassare Castiglione’s Il Libro del Cortegiano as The Book of the Courtyer. This commission seems to have been an isolated one for Elisabeth, although it is possible that other of her literary activities have been lost. Standing alone as it does, however, means that Elisabeth’s literary commission takes on increased importance. The timing of the commission is undoubtedly deliberate and significant and the commission can be viewed as a conscious attempt by Elisabeth to exert her authority at the court of Edward VI within the context of Edwardian female courtiers. Elisabeth’s commission for Book III of The Courtyer known as The Courtisan can be dated accurately to 1551, when Elisabeth was publicly, if still not legally, recognised as marchioness of Northampton. Given Parr’s reputation, the reputation of Elisabeth’s female relatives and the negative reputation Anne Seymour had gained as the wife of the Lord Protector, it was fundamentally important that Elisabeth also be publicly acknowledged as suitable for the role.460

Elisabeth’s commissioning of The Courtisan was an attempt to disassociate herself from the behaviour of her political predecessor, Anne Seymour: the negative reputation that she gained had a discernible impact on domestic and international politics that Elisabeth would have been keen to avoid. Habsburg ambassador Van der Delft reported to Charles V a conversation that he had had with William Paget, a member of the Protectorate and close friend and advisor of Edward Seymour, about the Lord protector’s behaviour immediately before the 1549 coup orchestrated against him by Parr and Dudley led to Seymour’s arrest. Van der Delft described Seymour’s conduct as ‘unseemly in one who was pretending to rule’ and told Paget that he considered him - Paget - ‘personally to blame for all the evil that had befallen this Kingdom, since he had been the principal instrument in setting us up a Protector who would certainly never do any good.’461 In

460 For the chronology of the commission to Hoby see chapter 2, pp. 49-53.
461 CSP Span. 1547-1549, VdD to CV, 13 August 1549 [originally in French and ciphered].
response Paget said ‘he has a bad wife’, which Van der Delft took as confirmation of Seymour’s unworthiness because a man who allowed himself to be ruled by his wife was clearly unable to rule a kingdom. Paget and Van der Delft acknowledged the failings of the protector, and fairly or not, they considered these to be to some extent the fault of his wife the duchess. Furthermore, when recounting the coup against Seymour Van der Delft recorded that Seymour attempted to bolster the remaining courtiers and peasants to defend him against the lords of the council, and took steps to protect his wife, who ‘went out weeping, very badly handled in words by the courtiers and peasants, who put all this trouble down to her.’ Even the ‘peasants’ had a negative view of Anne Seymour and the extent of her influence over her husband. Following the coup and Edward Seymour’s arrest, Anne Seymour was recorded by the Habsburg ambassador as further influencing events by convincing John Dudley to release her husband and return him to court. Why the common people and others such as Paget thought Anne had such a hold over and influence on him is not entirely clear, but nor does it really matter here. What is significant is that she was seen by her contemporaries to have had substantial influence, which extended beyond the personal and political to impact upon the governance of the realm - and was perceived so internationally.

Mindful of the example set by Anne Seymour and before her, Anne Boleyn and even to an extent her late sister-in-law, Katherine Parr, Elisabeth would undoubtedly have been aware that an unfavourable reputation undermined the political influence a woman could have. If any woman was publicly perceived as having inappropriate and malign influence over her husband (and/or England) she lost her opportunity for political engagement as she was conversely seen to have too much influence. By associating herself with *The Courtisan*, Elisabeth aligned herself with the text’s central female figures - the hostess Elisabetta Gonzaga, duchess of Urbino, and the idealised female courtier discussed in Book III - based on the duchess herself, who was both publicly acclaimed and politically influential. The text of Book III is littered with references to women’s virtues and modes of behaviour that would clearly resonate with Elisabeth as newly instated marchioness at

---

462 *CSP Span. 1547-1549*, VdD to CV, 13 August 1549 [originally in French and ciphered].
463 *CSP Span. 1547-1549*, VdD to CV, 8 August 1549.
464 *CSP Span. 1547-1549*, VdD to CV, 19 December 1549.
465 Anne Boleyn’s religio-political agency is highlighted in, for example, Ives, 204-217 and 260-287, and for differing opinions on the role that Anne’s agency played in her downfall specifically see the exchange of articles between Bernard and Ives in the *English Historical Journal*, as well as the response from Walaker. For more on Katherine Parr’s religio-political agency see James’s *Catherine Parr* and Mueller, 48-127 for the documents of Katherine’s activity.
this important time of her career. As Lord Julian - Hoby’s rendering of Giuliano de’ Medici - suggests, women at court
ought also to be more circumspect and take better heed that she give no occasion to be yll reported of, and so to beehave her selfe, that she be not onlye not spotted wyth anye fault, but not so much as with suspicion. Because a woman has not so manye ways to defende her selfe from sclaunderous reportes, as hath a man.\textsuperscript{467}

According to Castiglione and Hoby (via Lord Julian) a virtuous woman could not defend her own reputation and assert her own virtue, rather she had to have someone do it for her, thus Elisabeth Parr enlisted Thomas Hoby.

Elisabeth’s commission to Hoby is one of the first commissions of a secular printed text by a woman in English literary history.\textsuperscript{468} It would have been a huge statement for her to attempt such an enterprise as translating the text herself, were she able to do so. The small phrase transliterated into Greek script in a Latin Book of Hours previously belonging to Anne Boleyn is the only extant evidence of Elisabeth’s engagement with a language other than English.\textsuperscript{469} Unlike other women of her acquaintance, including Princess Elizabeth and Anne Bacon née Cooke, there is no evidence to suggest that Elisabeth could read or write Italian, or would have had any interest in translating the text herself.\textsuperscript{470} Despite this, Elisabeth was widely exposed to England’s mid-century Italianate culture - it is possible that Elisabeth could have engaged with the original text when she lived in Chelsea with Katherine Parr and she was at court during Katherine’s Queenship, when it is well known that Princess Elizabeth and probably Katherine were learning Italian.\textsuperscript{471} Elisabeth’s brothers William, Henry, George and John went to Italy in the 1540s to further their education - it is inconceivable that they did not come across a copy of the

\textsuperscript{467} The Courtyer, sig. B. ii
\textsuperscript{468} In 1473 the first text printed in the English language - William Caxton’s vernacular translation of the French Recayell of the Historyes of Troye - bears an engraving showing Caxton presenting the book to Margaret of York, duchess of Burgundy (sister of the English Kings Edward IV and Richard III, so Henry VIII’s great aunt, and therefore great-great-aunt to Edward VI, Mary and Elisabeth). This image is traditionally viewed as indicating some sort of patronage relationship between Caxton and the duchess, but the nature of this relationship and the extent to which Margaret might have been involved in the production or instigation of the text remains unknown. Others include Catherine of Aragon’s commission of Thomas Wyatt to translate a Petrarchan text for her during the early divorce proceedings, but instead he translated Plutarch’s Quiet of Mind. William Thomas’s An Argument was also commissioned by a woman, although no identity has as yet been suggested for the commissioner.
\textsuperscript{469} The Hever Manuscript Hours, f. 37; fig. 1, 83.
\textsuperscript{470} Mueller, Elizabeth: Translations, 2, 129-33; Starkey, Elizabeth, 27, 35 and 218 and Allen, The Cooke Sisters, 41-2.
\textsuperscript{471} James, Kateryn Parr, 19, 24-30; Mueller, Katherine Parr, 5-6, 82 and 370.
text when they were in the heart of Italian Renaissance culture. William Parr also participated in the fascination with Italian culture that persisted in the later Henrician court, evidenced by his engagement (along with Katherine Brandon, duchess of Suffolk) with an Italian preacher in London, 1548, and the Italianophile Hoby’s desire for Parr as a patron. Elisabeth would almost certainly have been aware of the text prior to 1551.

The use of a text to make a political statement was an isolated case for Elisabeth, but given the company in which she associated, it was not an entirely surprising action. Women’s learning and education were celebrated in Edwardian England. Although Elisabeth’s commission was rare and bold, it would not have been entirely unorthodox or improper. Her associations with Katherine Parr and her circle in the 1540s would have left Elisabeth perfectly poised to appreciate the value of collaborative translation as a political strategy. Katherine Parr’s commissioning of and participation in the grand project to translate Erasmus’ *Paraphrases upon the New Testament* across the mid-1540s - a project that famously included both male and female translators, one of whom was Princess Mary - was celebrated by contemporaries. In his preface to *The Paraphrase on the Gospel of John* from 1548, Nicholas Udall had much to say on women’s education and the abundance of educated women at the time, who welcomed and utilised their knowledge, commenting on what a number there were who in their ‘years of tender virginity’ were ‘as familiarly traded in the Latin and Greek tongues as in their own mother language, but also both in all kinds of profane literature and liberal arts exactly studied and exercised.’ These women were ‘able aptly, cunningly, and with much grace either to endite or translate into the vulgar tongue for the public enstruction and edifying of the unlearned multitude.’

Elisabeth lived at Chelsea Manor, which, as well as being a seat of female political power was also the location of a literary coterie under the supervision of William Grindal and Roger Ascham in the late 1540s, because, as Udall asserted

473 CSP Span. 1547-1549, 254, VdD to CV, 23 February 1548; *Travails and Life*, 63 and Overell, *Italian Reform*, 54. Parr’s enjoyment of all things Italian extended to his musical tastes - in the early 1540s he patronized the Bassano brothers, celebrated musicians of Venice. James, *Catherine Parr*, 130 citing Barbara E. Harrison, *The Bassanos, Italian Musicians at the English Court, 1531-1604*, (Privately Published, 1991), 1-20.
it is now no news in England to see you damsels in noble houses and in the
courts of princes, instead of cards and other instruments of idle trifling, to
have continually in their hands either Psalms, homilies, and other devout
meditations.\textsuperscript{476}

Women could read and reason in Greek, Latin French and Italian as in English, and

It is now no news at all to see Queens and ladies of most high estate and
progeny, instead of courtly dalliance, to embrace virtuous exercises of reading
and writing and, with most earnest study both early and late, to apply
themselves to the acquiring of knowledge as well in all other liberal arts and
disciplines.\textsuperscript{477}

Concluding with praise of those noblewomen who translate and participate in translation,
Udall makes his impressions of and feelings towards educated women very clear. Elisabeth
Parr was as per Udall’s model - an articulate, educated woman capable of sophisticated
literary practices, who made a deliberate and calculated choice to participate in this culture
of educated women with others such as the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth and Katherine
Parr but with added subtlety given her circumstances. Elisabeth was living with Katherine
Parr during work on the \textit{Paraphrases} and probably in November 1547 when Katherine
Brandon, duchess of Suffolk and William Parr reputedly convinced Katherine Parr to
publish her \textit{Lamentations of a Sinner}.\textsuperscript{478}

As well as hinting at her association with a network of educated, articulate and
politically active women, Elisabeth Parr’s translation was part of a socio-political network
of literature and kinship at the mid-Tudor courts. The first undisputed record of \textit{The
Courtyer} in English literary history is as Sir Thomas Wyatt’s satire of Castiglione’s text
addressed to Sir Francis Bryan from c. 1538/40, in which Wyatt parodies Bryan (who was
known as the Vicar of Hell) as the perfect courtier.\textsuperscript{479} In 1548 Francis Bryan took up the
legacy by translating a French version of Antonio de Guevaras’s Catalan text into the
vernacular as \textit{A dispraise of the life of the Courtier}, dedicating it to William Parr.\textsuperscript{480} Wyatt was
Elisabeth’s uncle by marriage, and by the time Bryan completed his work Elisabeth was

\textsuperscript{476} Udall, \textit{The Paraphrase}, cited by Mueller, 159; James, \textit{Catherine Parr}, 115-7, 279, Muller, 29 and Whitelock, 

\textsuperscript{477} Udall, \textit{The Paraphrase}, cited by Mueller, 159.

\textsuperscript{478} The title of \textit{Lamentations} claims that the work was ‘set forth and put in print at the instant desire’ of Parr
and Brandon. Mueller, 425. The first edition of \textit{Lamentations} is Katherine Parr, \textit{The lamentacion of a sinner, made
by the most virtuous Ladie, Quene Caterin} (London: Edward Whitchurd, 1547) STC 4827.

\textsuperscript{479} Wyatt’s satire (after called ‘How to use the court and him selfe therein, written to syr Fraunces Bryan’ was
printed in STC 13862. \textit{Songs and sonettes, written by the right honorable Lords Henry Hauward late Earle of Surrey, and
other. Apud Richardum Tottel. Cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum} (1557).

\textsuperscript{480} STC 12431 \textit{A dispraise of the life of a courteir, and a commendacion of the life of the labouryng man} (1548); Patricia
‘married’ to William Parr. Another text that might have relevance to Parr’s translation is William Thomas’s relatively little known *An Argument in which the apparaile of women is both reprooved and defended* from 1551. Thomas was a clerk of the privy council from 1551 and a member of the Dudley circle. His political strategies and Machiavellian influences on Edward VI were said to have been John Dudley’s ploy to make the young King more able to participate in his council, so Thomas was very comfortable with the subtleties of court politics. Both Thomas and Hoby were present on the embassy in 1551 when William Parr presented the French King, Henri II with the order of the garter - this is the association of Hoby and Parr that scholars use as the means by which the translation project may have been put to Hoby. The timing of Thomas’s *An Argument* is also significant. If the text were written and produced following a shrovetide feast, as it claims, then Elisabeth Parr might have been inspired to commission *The Courtyer* translation upon reading Thomas’s text. Alternatively, if Hoby and Thomas discussed the fact that Hoby was translating *The Courtisan* for Parr, Thomas might have been inspired by Elisabeth and/or her commission. It is conceivable that Parr commissioned both texts as the preface to *An Argument* highlights that the text was commissioned by a woman, but no candidate has ever been put forward. Elisabeth’s penchant for extravagant apparel - as highlighted above - might also have given the text the same personal significance as Castglione’s *Cortegiano*. In his discussion of Thomas’ *An Argument*…, A. J. Carlson suggests that rather than events of February 1551 inspiring the translation, an autumn date might be more suitable. If this were the case, Elisabeth Parr would have been active at the court for more than a season, including, for example, at the Vidame de Chartres’ dinner in June

---

481 STC 16612a.7 William Thomas, *An argument wherin the apparaile of women is both reprooved and defended*, Imprinted at London in Fletestrete : In the house of Thomas Berthelet (1551). Berthelet’s Epistle to the reader lays out the circumstances of the text’s commission, highlight how a gentlewoman was attacked for her fine appearance and fondness for clothes at a dinner a little before Shrovetide. The gentlewoman replied and they continued to argue, citing scripture and classical literature until William Thomas joined in and they agreed ‘that all cleyne ornaments were laufull unto women so longe as thei provijed neuther concupiscence, nor vaine glorie.’ For a shorttime, the ‘gentilwoman restyn, not fully satisfied with the once heryng of those oracions, desired maister Thomas of freendship, to sene theim translated unto hir. Which he promised to does. And all be it, that he willed hir, to kepe it to hir selfe: yet she thkyng it such a matter for the honest defence of women, as ought not to be hidden, hath intreated me, thus to sette it foorth.’ The aim of the publication was ‘to stoppe their mouthes, that with taylyng on womens maners, seeme to procure theim selves a credite.’ Sig. Ai-iii.


483 *Travails and life*, 74-5.

A further possible link between the texts is Hoby’s description of *The Courtyer* as ‘a mirrour [to help ladies and gentlemen] to decke and trimme themselues with vertuous condicions, comely behauiers and honest enterteinment toward al men.’ The idea of texts as mirrors is a very common trope for didactic literature, but Hoby’s particular allusion to apparel, combined with the timing of Thomas’s text and the known association between the men seems noteworthy.

When *The Courtyer* was finally published in 1561, the printer was William Seres who had begun his career in partnership with John Day. After achieving a degree of success they separated and from c. 1550 Seres was a member of the household of William Cecil, knighted in 1551. Also c. 1550 Seres printed a translation of Bernard Occhino’s Sermons by Anne Cooke, Cecil’s sister-in-law, through his marriage to Mildred Cooke in 1545. Mildred Cecil herself translated the text of St Basil from Latin to Greek and dedicated it to Lady Jane Grey in 1553. The third Cooke sister, Elizabeth, went on to marry Sir Thomas Hoby in 1558. Seres’ publication of Anne Cooke’s text demonstrates his affinity with both Italian literature, and texts associated with women. Like Occhino’s sermons, *Il Cortegiano* has a legacy of female literary engagement. Discussing *The Courtyer*’s legacy, Peter Burke highlights Elisabeth’s commission and Hoby’s confirmation of the fact in his prefatory epistle, commenting also that ‘in the same letter [Hoby] quotes the names of five Italian noblewomen who distinguished themselves as writers, as if to encourage Englishwomen to emulate them.’ Helen Smith also highlights the text’s legacy of female commissioners, placing Elisabeth alongside the original commissioner of the Cortegiano, Vittoria Colonna, Marchioness of Pescara, and highlights that Juan Boscán’s Spanish vernacular translation of *The Courtyer* was also commissioned by a woman. Smith gives brief biographical details of the Parrs, outlining Elisabeth’s reasons for commissioning the text and confirming that

---

485 CSP Span. 1550-1552, Jehan Scheve to Emperor Charles V, 17 June 1550, p. 110.
486 *The Courtyer*, Sig. Aiii.
490 Allen, *The Cooke Sisters*, 57-9 and notes on 87. Bacon’s translation was first printed anonymously in 1548, but added her initials to later versions.
492 Ibid. 2-3; L. G. Kelly, ‘Hoby, Sir Thomas (1530–1566)’, ODNB. Hoby and Cooke married in a joint ceremony with Mildred née Cooke and William Cecil on 27 June 1558.
Parr’s commission of a manuscript translation of the most relevant section of Castiglione’s work establishes the origins of Hoby’s text as one such ‘pecceamele’ interpretation appropriated for practical use, while her newly legitimate status established her cultural influence and ability to ‘will’ Hoby, a long-term associate of her husband, to undertake the translation.  494

In translating the text for Elisabeth, Smith asserts that ‘in writing anew Castiglione’s text at the request of a woman, Hoby was following in its first author’s footsteps.’  495 All scholars who have connected Elisabeth to the text do so in order to locate her among other female commissioners and appreciators of Castiglione’s text. The significance of the commission for Elisabeth is little registered.  496 Jonathan Woolfson confirms that the commission was Elisabeth’s,  497 and Mary Partridge’s thesis and subsequent article cite Elisabeth’s commission, but take her biographical details from Susan James’s biography of Katherine Parr, which is necessarily limited by the brief time for which the women were associated. Partridge’s assessment of Parr does not account for Elisabeth’s full political situation at the Edwardian court at the time of the commission, or at the Elizabethan court when the text was printed.  498

The key aspect of Elisabeth’s literary commission is the degree to which it aligned her with the court and willingness to advise others (namely the court at large) of herself and her characteristics. Hoby described his commissioner as ‘a gentlewoman of the courte’ and The Courtyer itself as fruitful for male and female courtiers.  499 The text is didactic and the behaviours necessary for a female courtier are all qualities that can be read into Elisabeth’s activity at the court. Through her commission Elisabeth defined herself as a courtier above all. Clearly she was adept at interweaving literary patronage activity with clever and subtle political statements that engineered the public’s impression of her and her court career. Partridge questioned Elisabeth’s motive in commissioning the translation, highlighting that

---

495 Ibid.
496 That Elisabeth commissioned The Courtyer is not even always recorded. L. G. Kelly’s ODNB entry for Hoby, for example, records that ‘he went to France in the train of William Parr, marquess of Northampton. … His ‘Travels and Life’ (1551–64) shows him to be an interested and perceptive participant in aristocratic life abroad. Out of that experience came his translation of Castiglione’s Il cortegiano, done in Paris in 1552–3 and published in 1561.’ This suggests a connection between William Parr and The Courtyer, but makes no mention of Elisabeth. L. G. Kelly, ‘Hoby, Sir Thomas (1530–1566)’, ODNB.
497 Woolfson, 415. Woolfson, Smith et al cite Mary Partridge (see below note 498).
499 The Courtyer, sig. Bv.
If Elizabeth’s sole objective was to bolster her respectability, we might reasonably wonder why she chose to commission the translation of a secular work. It seems likely, however, that she also wished to advertise her status as a luminary of civil society.\textsuperscript{500}

John Guy, however, suggests that ‘literature was the prevailing medium of élite political discourse, one which Renaissance convention recognized as a valid means of counseling.'\textsuperscript{501} Elisabeth’s commission highlights her political acumen by enabling her to counsel the court of her suitability to assume a central public role as well as indirectly presenting herself as an accomplished, educated, and yet modest woman. Because of this Elisabeth’s commission is illustrative of her education and literacy, as well as the adeptness with which she navigated and maneuvered at the complex and fragile Edwardian court.

**A reconsideration of the impact of including women in the politics of Edward’s reign**

Elisabeth’s activity and importance during the reign of Edward VI is demonstrable through an examination of the surviving evidence, as in chapter 2 and above. It is also possible to read her significance into other key events and circumstances, which suggests her prominent position in a kinship and socio-political network operating around the Edwardian court. The remainder of this chapter reconsiders the impact of Elisabeth’s marriage to William Parr c. 1548, the marriage of Katherine Parr and Thomas Seymour in 1547, the coup to oust Edward Seymour from the office of Lord Protector led by William Parr and John Dudley in 1549 and the coup to place Jane Grey on England’s throne. A reconsideration of these politically significant events allows the integration of Elisabeth into the narrative and ascertains her impact. Additionally, analysing these events permits recognition of Edwardian female courtiers as integral to the political machinations of the Edwardian court as part of dual-gendered socio-political and kinship networks operating at and around the court. A discussion of the Parr siblings’ marriages also highlights the strategies of communication employed by the women during the early years of Edward’s reign that would become integral to the operation of female courtiers under Elizabeth I.

The date of the Parr-Seymour marriage was significant. Henry VIII had died in January 1547, and from as early as February of that year Katherine Parr was writing intimate letters to Thomas Seymour, signing herself ‘her that ys yowrs to serve and obey

\textsuperscript{500} Partridge, ‘Images of the Courtier’, 19.

\textsuperscript{501} Guy, Tudor England, 410.
duryng her lyf.\footnote{Sudeley Castle, Gloucestershire, Dent-Brocklehurst MS, KP to TS, [c. mid-February, 1547]. My analysis of the letters follows Janel Mueller’s ordering and approximate dating of the letters as per her \textit{Katherine Parr, the Complete Works and Correspondence}. Mueller’s ordering of the letters is problematic, however, as when Thomas Seymour comments that he thinks Anne Herbert knows of their business, even though this has been acknowledged in their ‘previous’ letters. Following this reference, Mueller talks of the couple’s ‘playful’ language, which alternates between discussing the marriage as a past and/or future event.} She took steps to reassure him of her longstanding desire to be his wife, claiming

as god ys god my mynd was fully bent the other time I was at lybertye to marye yow before any man I knew. Howbeyt god withstode my will theryn moost vehemently for atyme.

In May 1547, the Habsburg ambassador Van de Delft reported a rumour that Thomas Seymour,

the Lord Admiral is going to marry the Duchess of Suffolk, but I do not know yet how true this may be. The Queen has again taken to wearing a hood and her mourning garb is now of silk.\footnote{It should be noted that Katherine Parr’s second marriage had taken place little more than a year after her first husband’s death and that she had married Henry VIII four months after the death of her second husband. The crucial difference was the Henry was the King and a swift remarriage potentially cast doubt on the parentage of any child born soon after. Henry’s sister, Mary Tudor, was required to stay in France for a year after the death of her husband, King Louis IX in order to verify that she was not carrying an heir to the throne. James, \textit{Catherine Parr}, 56-7 and 95-8; Scarisbrick, 56-8}

That Van der Delft records that Katherine Parr was changing into half mourning for the King her late husband, four months after his death, while in the same line referring to Thomas Seymour’s potential marriage partner (Katherine Brandon, not the dowager Queen) highlights just how swift was Katherine’s remarriage was.\footnote{CSP Span. 1547-49, 99-100, VdD to KP, 4 May 1547.} In mid-June Van der Delft reported to the Emperor that ‘I have been informed from a secret source that a marriage is being arranged between the Queen Dowager and the Lord Admiral brother of the Protector.’\footnote{CSP Span. 1547-49, 105, VdD to CV, 16 Jun 1547.} On 10 July 1547 Van der Delft informed the Emperor that ‘the Queen was married a few days since to the Lord Admiral, the brother of the Protector.’\footnote{CSP Span. 1547-49, 123-4, VdD to CV, 10 July 1547.} In August he reported to Prince Philip of Spain

You highness will have learnt that the widowed Queen has married the Lord Admiral, brother of the Protector, and he will remain here with the Council to take the place of his brother during the absence of the latter in Scotland, after which it is expected that the Lord Admiral will be made a duke.\footnote{CSP Span. 1547-49, 136, VdD to PoS, 18 August 1547.}

Suggesting that the disapproval over the marriage was not universal, Edward VI’s only comment on the marriage was the somewhat bathetic ‘the Lord Seymour of Sudeley
married the Queen, whose name was Catherine, with which marriage the Lord Protector was much offended.\textsuperscript{508}

The full political impact and consequences of the Parr-Seymour marriage can only be fully gleaned when combined with the scandal caused by the concurrent marriage of Katherine's brother William Parr to Elisabeth. The opposition that both Parr siblings' marriages faced from the council and particularly the lord protector is a key reason that they should be considered together. The opposition to William’s marriage to Elisabeth could be explained solely on religious grounds, as divorce was against the teachings of the church. Yet the wording of the privy council’s ruling against the marriage reveals that religion was not the key issue for the council. The fear was that the couple would set a dangerous precedent that would ‘brede manifold disordres and inconveniences within the Realme.’\textsuperscript{509} That this was a real concern was probably because of the concurrent and indecently hasty marriage of Katherine Parr to Thomas Seymour. The Parr-Seymour and Parr-Cobham marriages and the institutional response of the council are more extensively to do with kinship and the broader political context of the early Edwardian period than existing scholarship on the turbulent relationship between the Seymour brothers and their ambitious wives has given credit.\textsuperscript{510} Surviving evidence of the machinations involved in the marriages is revealing of how socio-political networks operated in the early years of Edward’s reign.

William and Elisabeth’s marriage was not just improprietous, it was radical. William’s success in securing the passing of the Northampton Divorce Act in 1552 meant that he had technically succeeded where Henry VIII had failed by legally separating from his wife and being allowed to marry another woman while the first wife lived.\textsuperscript{511} For Henry VIII to marry Anne Boleyn while Catherine of Aragon was alive he had to irrevocably break with the Catholic Church in Rome, face excommunication and eventually annul his marriage to Catherine on the grounds of affinity because of Catherine’s first marriage to

\textsuperscript{508} Chronicle of Edward VI, 6. The comment is undated but related events suggest it was recorded sometime around May/June 1547.
\textsuperscript{509} PC2/2 f. 274.
\textsuperscript{510} Alford, Kingship and Politics, 9-11, 95-9; Guy, Tudor England, 197-201 for brief accounts of the rivalry between the Seymour brothers.
\textsuperscript{511} No evidence seems extant of the proceedings that legalized the Parrs’ marriage, Pollard, 262; Lawrence Stone, Road to Divorce: England, 1530-1987 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 329. However a private act of parliament must have taken place as this is how Mary repealed the proceedings in 1553: 1. Mar. Session 2, Private Act of Parliament ref. the Marquess of Northampton's marriage confirmation, repealed, c. 12, 1553.
Henry’s brother, Arthur.\textsuperscript{512} That contemporaries thought William and Elisabeth’s relationship and desire to marry was reminiscent of the triangle between Henry VIII, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn is suggested by an anonymous Spanish chronicler of Henry’s reign.\textsuperscript{513} In the passage in which the chronicler refers to the origins of Elisabeth and William’s relationship, he twice mistakenly refers to William Parr, earl of Essex as lord Rochford - who was actually George Boleyn, Anne’s brother, executed in 1536 for committing incest with Anne. The chronicler manfully protested Anne Bourchier’s innocence - despite the fact that by 1543 she was known to have had at least one child with her lover - and described Parr’s behaviour as ‘[g]reat blindness of the Earl, indeed! For the sake of another to quit his lawful wife, who, after she left him, was never known to do anything wrong.’\textsuperscript{514} These sentiments suggest that the chronicler had in mind his countrywoman Catherine of Aragon when he wrote of Anne Bourchier, and conflated Parr and Elisabeth with the Boleyns.

The Parrs’ controversial marriage has received scholarly attention, although Elisabeth herself has not been considered. Instead the focus is on the impact of the marriage on Katherine Parr and the political climate of early Edwardian England. In her \textit{Lives of the Queens of England} Agnes Strickland recorded that William Parr’s guilty and unhappy wife, the heiress of Essex, was [in 1548] at Sudley [sic] Castle, under some restraint, and in the keeping of her royal sister-in-law. This unpleasant charge must have great disquieted the last troubled months of Katharine Parr’s life.\textsuperscript{515}

Strickland is here misinterpreting the act of the privy council exiling Elisabeth to Chelsea Manor - the London home of Katherine Parr, rather than to Sudeley, the seat associated


\textsuperscript{513} \textit{Chronicle of Henry VIII}, 137.

\textsuperscript{514} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{515} Strickland, 81. A similar account of events appears in Antonia Fraser’s \textit{Six Wives}: ‘Another guest in Queen Catherine’s household was the result of benevolence on her part: she agreed to take into her custody her erstwhile sister-in-law Anne Bourchier, Countess of Essex and now, for want of a divorce from William Parr, Marchioness [sic] of Northampton. As an accused adulteress - a charge certainly true - Anne Bourchier would otherwise have faced a far more unpleasant fate.’ Antonia Fraser, \textit{The Six Wives of Henry VIII} (London: Random House, 2007), 495-6. In \textit{Thomas Cranmer: A Life}, Diarmaid MacCulloch also confuses Anne - from whom Parr separated in 1541 - and Elisabeth, writing that William Parr’s marriage to ‘Elizabeth Bourchier had been dead long before she had deserted him in 1542, and now he was determined to marry Elizabeth Brooke.’ Diarmaid MacCulloch, \textit{Thomas Cranmer: A Life} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 367. Anne Bourchier never held the title marchioness of Northampton, nor did she live with her sister-in-law in 1548 in either London or Gloucestershire. Since 1542 Anne had been living with her lover and their children in Surrey.
with her new husband, Thomas Seymour’s barony. At the time of the Parrs’ marriage, David Starkey noted that ‘Parr was separated but not divorced from his first wife at the time, [so his] second marriage was bigamous.’ Once public knowledge, the marriage ‘became a plaything of religious politics: its validity was asserted by Protestants and rejected by Catholics.’ Roderick Philips cites the Parrs’ marriage as evidence of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer having changed his opinion on divorce within a decade as in 1548 he (as one member of a learned commission) granted Parr permission to marry Elisabeth while his adulterous first wife lived. In 1540 Cranmer had claimed ‘What can possibly be alleged in your excuse when you allow a man, after a divorce, when both man and woman are living, to contract a fresh marriage?’ Neither Lawrence Stone nor Philips mention Elisabeth by name even though both make it clear that Parr’s efforts to remarry were because of a specific woman. John Cordy Jeaffreson removed all agency from Elisabeth with regard to her marriage, commenting that Elisabeth ‘yielded to her suitor’s impatience’ when she wed Parr before the commission reached a decision. It was Parr, rather than Elisabeth, who engaged in divorce proceedings, but given that the 1552 Northampton Divorce Act was the first legal instance of divorce in England it is perhaps surprising that it, and Elisabeth as the reason for it, have not received greater scholarly attention. Of interest here, however, is the impact that the marriage had on the political scene of early Edwardian England, particularly when considered alongside Katherine Parr and Thomas Seymour’s concurrent relationship.

The issues created by rivalry and loyalty within kinship networks that also had political authority are crucial to understanding the power play that occurred between the Somersets, the Sudeleys and the Northamptons, as well as the Herberts and Katherine Brandon, in the first part of Edward’s reign. The Seymour duke and duchess of Somerset did not support or favour the marriage and alliance between Katherine Parr and Thomas Seymour, although the couple had other important relatives and friends who not only supported the marriage, but promoted it. This inter-familial conflict contributed to the power struggles between the significant political personages at and around the Edwardian

516 Thomas Seymour was elevated to the Barony of Sudeley in the distribution of honours that followed Edward VI’s accession. He and Katherine Parr did spend time at Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire, particularly in the lead up to the birth of their daughter - suggesting a desire perhaps to associate their heir with the Barony rather than Katherine’s old life as queen. See James, *Catherine Parr*, 261-86.
518 Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 303-4, 308, 314, 317 and 348; Roderick Phillips, *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23-4. No source is given for Cranmer’s comment, which, according to Phillips, was written in a letter to a ‘Reformer’.
519 Ibid.
court, which in turn had an impact upon the governance and stability of the realm. Katherine Brandon was an important part of the conducting of both marriages. Thomas Seymour wanted her as a supporter of the marriage; writing to Katherine Parr 'I presome I have my lady of soffokes good will touching my nown desyr of yow' and according to Van der Delft, it was 'by means of' Katherine Parr and Katherine Brandon that Parr and Elisabeth married.\textsuperscript{521} Anne Herbert, countess of Pembroke - Katherine and William’s sister - several times acted as a messenger or bearer for the Seymours, transferring letters between them when they were still attempting to hide their relationship. Katherine commented that she ‘received a letter from you by the means of my sister Herbert, who sent the same unto me by one of her servants, for the which I give you my most hearty thanks.’ Thomas informed Katherine ‘I wrett your highnes a letter yester day of part of my mynd therein whyche I toke to my brother harbart to be delvered to hys wyff, who I thynk knoth of our matters nott be me.’\textsuperscript{522} Thomas Seymour also reported to Katherine that he had visited the home of his ‘brother harbarde’ and commented that he walked and discussed their matter with his

\begin{quote}
sester harbarde … for be her compeney (indeffawght [in default] of youres) I shall shorten the wekes in these parttes, whyche hertofoorre wurre iij dayes lenger in every of them then they wurre under the plumette in chelsey.\textsuperscript{523}
\end{quote}

In one of his letters, probably from March, Thomas Seymour records

\begin{quote}
yestre day in the mornyng I hade wretten a lettre unto your highnes, uppon occashen that I mett with a man of my lordes markes as I came to chelsey … who told nycolas frogmorton that I was in chelsey ffeldes.\textsuperscript{524}
\end{quote}

Thomas’s comments illustrate how the political intercourse between members of the Parrs’ kinship networks and political alliances physically operated away from the court, centred around the rival court at Chelsea and in opposition to the Somersets. Seymour met a member of William Parr’s household who passed information regarding Seymour to Nicholas Throckmorton, Parr’s cousin then in the household of Katherine Parr at Chelsea. Nicholas Throckmorton was kin to the Parrs through their mutual ancestor, Elizabeth Vaux; he had served with William Parr in the household of Henry Fitzroy, duke of Richmond, then in Katherine’s royal household.\textsuperscript{525} Evidently Throckmorton had continued

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{521} SP 10/1 f. 43 (stamped 132), TS to KP, [late May] 1547 and CSP Span. 1547-1549, VdD to CV, 23 February 1548, 254
\textsuperscript{522} Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D1070, art. 2, ff. 4-5, KP to TS, [May] 1547; the references suggest this is a later copy of Thomas’s letter of the 17 May in which he mentions dining with the Herberths. SP 10/1 f. 43 (stamped 132), TS to KP, May 1547.
\textsuperscript{523} SP 10/1 f. 144, TS to KP, 17 May 1547, cited in Mueller, 136.
\textsuperscript{524} SP 46/1 f. 14, TS to KP, March 1547.
\textsuperscript{525} James, Catherine Parr, 37-46, 52.
\end{footnotes}
to serve her as dowager Queen and it is he who is considered the likely author of the poem that describes Katherine’s Chelsea residence as ‘a second court’.\textsuperscript{526} In the conduct of the marriages and alliances Throckmorton acted as an information broker, like Parr’s ‘man’, passing letters and carrying messages, what could even be termed ‘gossip’. William and Anne Herbert, too, entertained the couple and passed letters. This interplay through correspondence and information sharing also reveals the physicality of the rival court structure during the early years of Edward’s reign. Van der Delft recorded that even after her marriage to Thomas Seymour, Katherine Parr

still causes herself to be served ceremoniously as Queen, which it appears is the custom here. Nevertheless when she went lately to dine at the house of her new husband she was not served with the royal state, from which it is presumed that she will eventually live according to her new condition.\textsuperscript{527}

Katherine was inhabiting two roles, maintaining her royal dignity in her own residence but acting as Lady Sudeley when in Seymour’s home. This is reminiscent of a monarch’s two bodies - the body politic and body natural - but is highly unusual for a consort, emphasising just how rare and unorthodox was Katherine’s position. There had not been a dowager Queen in England since Elizabeth Woodville, widow of Edward IV.

The duke and duchess of Somerset were the main opposition to both marriages. King Edward supported both. It was Edward Seymour who drove through the privy council’s act against William and Elisabeth’s marriage once it had become public knowledge in January 1548.\textsuperscript{528} No evidence survives documenting the personal opinions of Edward or Anne Seymour on Elisabeth’s marriage to William Parr, but the fact that the privy council acted contrary to the findings of the commission suggests that there were personal feelings - Seymour’s - involved in the decision to separate the Parrs. The negative reaction to both marriages was family rivalry played out on the highest stage, manifesting

\textsuperscript{526} The legend of Nicholas Throckmorton, stanza 67. Elsewhere in the poem Throckmorton writes of the importance of his Parr kin - Katherine, William Parr and their sister and brother-in-law, Anne and William Herbert, earl and countess of Pembroke - for his and his brothers’ patronage and positions at court:

\begin{quote}
Then Pembroke and his wife, who sister was  
Unto the Queen, their kinsfolk friended much;  
And Parr; their brother, did them both surpass:  
Who, for to pleasure us, did never grudge.  
Now when these called us ‘cousin’, at each word  
The other peers would friendly speech afford.
\end{quote}

Stanza 59, cited in Mueller, 190.

\textsuperscript{527} CSP Span. 1547-49, 123-4, VdD to CV, 10 July 1547.

\textsuperscript{528} PC2/2 f. 274, Commission to investigate the marriage of William Parr and Elisabeth Cobham, 31 January 1548.
itself through politics and power struggles. Thomas Seymour acknowledged that he felt rejected by his brother, the one person who should have supported him. 529 In the face of this rejection, Thomas Seymour joined the Parr family and their alliances, which were strengthened by Elisabeth Parr’s banishment. That she was sent to Chelsea Manor to be with Katherine Parr only served to strengthen the alliance, in opposition to Seymour. Following Katherine Parr’s death in September 1548, however, the stability of the Chelsea Manor alliance faltered and subsequently collapsed.

Katherine Parr’s death and Thomas Seymour’s political meltdown were the catalysts of Edward Seymour’s downfall, as any man guilty of fratricide was seen as incapable of good governance of the realm. John Dudley and William Parr seized the opportunity provided by Edward Seymour’s loss of public and court support to act and led the other lords of the council in a coup against him. 530 Whilst Edward’s actions towards his brother provided the catalyst that gave Parr and Dudley the opportunity to act, allusions to Elisabeth in surviving documents from 1549 suggest that Edward Seymour’s actions towards the Parrs and their intended marriage, and that of Katherine Parr, were the reason that William Parr transferred his loyalty and allegiance from Edward Seymour to John Dudley. 531 As W.K Jordan has asserted, ‘the moral tone which Somerset was seeking to establish in the governance of England was rudely shaken by [Parr’s] singularly tawdry and vexatious divorce case.’ 532 Added to this Seymour’s part in the execution of his own brother, the political stability at the upper echelons of Edwardian society was deeply shaken, and the situation inevitably worsened when rebellions sprang up around the country across the spring and summer of 1549. 533 William Parr’s deposition relating to Thomas Seymour’s attainder for treason acknowledges his continued dissatisfaction with the Somerset protectorate, and confirms that his anger about the failure of his marriage suit was at the root of this dissatisfaction, with an allusion to Elisabeth and his affection for her that would constitute a reason for acting against Somerset. Addressing to the council ‘what conference he hath had with the Lord Admyrall within this Twelvemonth’ after Thomas Seymour’s arrest, William Parr asserted

529 SP10/4 ff. 35-6, TS to KP, 9 June 1548.
531 In his monograph, Northumberland, Beer acknowledges that part of the reason Parr was so loyal to Dudley was the grudge he held against Somerset for his refusal to recognise Parr’s marriage to Elisabeth Cobham, 72-73. Similarly, W. K. Jordan asserts that the ‘tangled and unhappy case [of his second marriage] alienated Northampton irrevocably from Somerset, one of whose most bitter enemies he became.’ 367. Although both scholars make these comments, neither explores the Parrs’ relationship and its implications in depth or relates the Parrs’ marriage to that between Katherine Parr and Thomas Seymour.
532 Jordan, 366.
FYRST the Lord Admirall abowte a Yere paste, supposing for diverse Causes that I was not contentid and pleasid, (as he knew well enough the Cawse why he shuld think so) discoursid with me as well of his own Estate, as also of mine, and advised me to go and sett up Howse in the North Contre, wher as my Lands laye; thynking it to be moche for my Commoditie, and that being welbelovid ther …, I shuld be the more strong and more able to serve the Kyng’s Maiestie; and by that Meanyes I shuld se my Lord Protector and the Counseill wold be as glad of me, as I of them.534

Thomas Seymour had sent letters to Parr and other members of the court suggesting that they look to their lands and raise their tenants in order that they could take on Somerset and the Protectorate as an institution.535 Parr’s retelling of these events, however, possessed a more personal tone that points to Elisabeth. The ‘diverse Causes that [Parr] was not contentid and pleasid’ that the Lord Admiral ‘knew well enough the Cawse why’ were the various ways in which Parr had been disappointed by the Somerset Protectorate. These included Somerset’s refusal to authorise or countenance Parr’s marriage to Elisabeth. It could be her that he would ‘sett up Howse in the North Contre’ with, and being with his beloved wife would certainly make him stronger and more able to serve Edward and his council. Elisabeth had held land in the North of England since 1547. No evidence is extant that she maintained a residence on her land c. 1549 but the Parrs had a residence at Kendal Castle c. 1553 so it is quite possible that they, or Elisabeth at least, did so c. 1548/9 and that it was to Kendal Castle that Parr was advised by Seymour to go.536

The vehemence of Parr’s testimony against the protector contrasts with the mild mannered, congenial and ultimately weak man that historians have universally characterised Parr to be.537 He is seen as a man who was easily led, and despite titles, honours and offices, far less significant than his sister (or, as this thesis seeks to establish, his wife). This apparent weakness is drawn partly from several key events or instances from the Edwardian period, including his refusal to take on the care of and responsibility for his orphaned niece, Lady Mary Seymour, after the deaths of Katherine Parr and Thomas Seymour, which

534 CP 150/122, The deposition of William Parr, February 1549.
535 James, *Catherine Parr*, 295-8.
536 TNA E154/2/40, Inventory from Westmorland, 1553.
537 Parr’s lack of success in dealing with the Norfolk rebellion coupled with his failure to take responsibility for his orphaned niece have led to a rather unfavourable posthumous reputation. With regard to the former point, for example, David Loades records that Parr was dispatched to Norfolk to cut off the rebels’ supplies and negotiate, but he ‘did neither of those things.’ Kett rebuffed the royal forces, and all attempts ‘at maintaining the façade of peaceful petitioning … had been wasted’ due to ‘Parr’s incompetence rather than Somerset’s aggression.’ Loades, *The Mid-Tudor Crisis*, 124-5. More charitable than most, Susan James describes Parr as deserving of more scholarly attention than he has received but claims that his career ‘in the final analysis owes less to his own efforts than to the efforts of the women in his life’, namely his sister and second wife. James, *Catherine Parr*, 13.
appears to have been based on a consistent misquotation from a letter of Katherine Brandon to William Cecil from 1549. According to Katherine, William Parr was meant and willing (to an extent) to take responsibility for his niece’s care, but as she wrote to Cecil in July 1549,

> my lord Marquis northampt[on] to whome I would delyver her, hathe as weke a back for suche a burd[en] as I have And wuld receave her, but mor[e] willingly if he might receave her with thapertenaun[ces].

Katherine’s comments about Parr’s (un)willingness to take on responsibility for his niece have been repeatedly misquoted due to an over-reliance on the cropped version of this quotation that appears in the *Calendar of State Papers*. In turn, this has led to the repeated characterisation of William Parr as a weak man. An example of this is Linda Porter’s assessment of Parr’s dealings in the case of Mary Seymour. Porter surmises the situation as

> Northampton was scarcely in a position to offer shelter to his niece, and in any case he does not seem to have taken much interest in her. The duchess of Suffolk described him as ‘having a weak back for such a burden’.

Katherine’s references to Parr relate to the financial burden of taking care of baby Mary, but the circulation of the curtailed quotation has cast a slur on Parr’s character. As is clear from the full quotation, Porter’s comments are out of context, and the tone of Katherine’s comment is completely altered in scholarly criticism that fails to contextualise it, or include Katherine Brandon’s ‘as I have’. In the case of Lady Mary Seymour, Katherine decided against petitioning William further, likening him to a fickle woman, and declaring that if she used something like reverse psychology on him, he would eventually do as she wished:

> I thinke it the better way to let him alone in it ajen, bede it him, for so untoward lyke women be some mene to folowe ther owen commodetes if the be frendly exortede ther unto / wyche for bedene the do with muche better wyll.

Another indication of Parr’s apparent weakness and incapability were his supposed military failings, characterised especially by his failure to secure Norwich during Kett’s Rebellion in July 1549; from which he was rescued and reinforced by John Dudley.

---

538 SP10/8 f. 60, KBDuS to WC, 24 July 1549.
539 Porter, 341. Porter cites James’ *Catherine Parr* as her source for these comments and James cites the state papers in their calendared form but does include the full quotation. Porter has therefore intentionally cropped the quotation and deliberately altered the tone of Katherine’s comment. See James, *Catherine Parr*, 300.
540 SP 10/10 f. 9 (stamped 10), KBDuS to WC, 9 May 1549.
541 Dudley said of Parr, ‘[h]e has lately had enough misfortune and this might discourage him for ever. I shall be glad to serve with or under him. No one should be discarded for one mischance, which may happen to us all.’ SP 10/8 f. 29, JDEoW to WC, 10 August 1549.
Whether or not there was a genuine friendship between the men, or simply a mutually beneficial alliance, the development of Parr and Dudley’s alliance at this time can be ascribed to loyalty and personal motivation. Edward Seymour’s refusal to countenance Parr’s second marriage to Elisabeth, and his treatment of Parr’s sister’s marriage to his brother, Thomas Seymour, roused Parr’s resentment, and provided enough motivation for him to switch his loyalty from Seymour’s regime to Dudley’s, regardless of any additional feelings about Seymour’s policies and general governance. In early October 1549, two months after Dudley and Parr had served together on their military campaign, Edward Seymour summoned the lords of the council to attend him. When many (including Dudley and Parr) did not respond Seymour sensed that the lords were moving against him, and took steps to protect his interests, such as forcibly taking the young King into his household. In response the Lords assembled in London, and led by Dudley and Parr they summoned the lord mayor of London and the other city officials and seized and garrisoned the Tower of London. A few days later, Seymour was escorted to the Tower. Council meetings resumed but the balance of power had shifted slightly, and Northampton was high in favour. An indication of this is the list of recipients of the order of the garter in December 1549 - both were close associates of Parr. One, William Herbert, earl of Pembroke was a privy councillor and Parr’s brother-in-law, and the second was George Brooke, Parr’s father-in-law through his now unopposed (although not yet officially legalised) marriage to Elisabeth. Edward Seymour was released from the Tower and returned to court in February 1550. Dudley assumed the role of unofficial head of the council, not officially sworn in, from 1552. From the beginning of the Dudley presidency, Elisabeth had access to the court and was recognised as Parr’s wife. One of Dudley’s earliest acts when officially sworn in as lord president was to engineer the passing of the Northampton Divorce Act - clear recognition of the fact that Parr’s affection for

---

542 Katherine asserted to William Cecil that she would not petition William Parr further over Mary Seymour, as she was simultaneously hoping that he would use his influence and join with her and John Dudley, earl of Warwick to secure the duke of Somerset’s approval of the marriage of her son, the young duke of Suffolk, and Somerset’s daughter. Remarking almost conspiratorially on this to Cecil, Katherine confided ‘I am vere glayd that the erles bendethe for althow the markes seme frend in his partt yett I am s[adonente] and therfore ther is no queyston but if the one procede the other wyll folowe after.’ Katherine Brandon’s comments in this letter are revealing about the strength of the alliance between Parr and Dudley in the spring and summer of 1549, just prior to their coup against Somerset. SP 10/10 f. 9 (stamped 10), KBDuS to WC, 9 May 1549.

543 The duke of Somerset was arrested and remanded in the Tower of London on 13 October 1549. Guy, Tudor England, 213.


546 Ibid.
Elisabeth underpinned his political activity and allegiances, and the extent to which Dudley was aware of this.

Elisabeth’s most consequential involvement in the reign of Edward VI came at its culmination. In 1553 she may have acted as the marriage broker for Guildford Dudley and Jane Grey. Elisabeth’s involvement in the Grey and Dudley match is supported by two pieces of primary evidence. First is the warrant dated 24 April 1553 for ‘wedding apparel’ to be delivered to Jane and Guildford as bride and groom, their mothers and the marchioness, whose inclusion in such an elite group does suggest involvement in the match. The second piece of evidence is a reference in a letter by William Cecil that is no longer extant. Writing to William Paget in 1562 Cecil recalled that the initiative for the match had come from the marchioness of Northampton. In 1562 Cecil and Elisabeth Parr were in almost daily contact, and he was aware of her inclination for and skill in political affairs. Although he was writing after the event, there seems little reason to distrust Cecil’s information. Elisabeth Parr had a longstanding association with Lady Jane, having resided with her at Chelsea Manor in 1548 and would almost certainly have known Guildford Dudley - they would have been at court together on numerous occasions and she played cards with his brother, Robert, in the spring of 1553. That the Parrs’ had an interest in another of the matches celebrated at the Whitsun Weddings suggests that the Grey-Dudley match was not Elisabeth’s primary concern. The triple marriages celebrated at the Whitsun Weddings were intended to bind four of Edwardian England’s most influential noble families - the Dudley, Herbert, Grey and Hastings families - together through their children in order to support the future monarch - whether that was an adult Edward VI, or Queen Jane. Elisabeth’s involvement could well have stemmed from a desire to protect and further the interests of her nephew, Henry Herbert, the eldest son and heir of William Parr’s late sister Anne and her husband William, earl of Pembroke. Following the death of Katherine Parr’s only daughter Mary c. 1550, Henry and his siblings were the Parrs’ nearest heirs. Elisabeth also had significant involvement with Henry’s bride, Catherine Grey throughout her court career.

The ‘Whitsun Weddings’ were the means by which John Dudley, duke of Northumberland reputedly engineered his family’s entry into the royal family and the line

547 BL Royal MS 8 C XXIV, ff. 340v, 363v - Warrant for apparel for the Whitsun Weddings, April 1553.
548 Reference to the letter appears in Strype, Annals of the Reformation, v. IV, 485 and in Read, Mr Secretary, 94-5.
549 See Appendix C fig. g for a dynastic representation of the marital alliances made during the Whitsun Weddings.
of succession to the English throne by attaching his son to Jane Grey. Whether or not the
duke or anyone else at the court knew in April 1553 that the King was dying is a question
that is unlikely to be answered without fresh evidence.\textsuperscript{550} If Elisabeth had supported Jane’s
claim to the throne prior to Edward’s death she would have been neglecting or overlooking
that of her kinswoman and friend, Elizabeth, as well. It seems far more likely that although
Elisabeth’s marriage brokering was the means by which John Dudley was able to
manoeuvre his son, albeit briefly, onto the consort’s throne, that was not the intention of
either party when the match was made. That the Parrs did support Queen Jane after
Edward’s death is clear and unsurprising.\textsuperscript{551} The facts of Elisabeth’s support of Jane in July
1553 are not mutually exclusive to a dynastic role rather than high political engagement in
the events of April of that year. That Elizabeth Tudor does not seem to have resented the
Parrs’ involvement in the Jane Grey coup might confirm that the original intention was not
to supplant Elizabeth’s claim. Instead they reacted as best they could as events unfolded.\textsuperscript{552}

In seeming contravention to the idea that Elisabeth initiated the Grey-Dudley match,
Eric Ives raises Northumberland’s later testimony, commenting

When interrogated after Mary’s victory, Northumberland said that the marriage
was promoted by Pembroke, along with the marriage of the earl’s son to Jane’s
sister; later he added the marquis of Northampton (not the marchioness), the
duke of Suffolk and ‘others’, which implies a general welcome for these
marriages among the elite group.\textsuperscript{553}

The reference in Northumberland’s testimony to Lord Northampton does not by any
means indicate that Elisabeth was not also involved, perhaps even significantly in brokering
the marriage in her own right. Rather it might suggest that couple were mutually engaged in
political activity, of which the intended outcome could well have been to strengthen the
dynastic alliances between Edward’s courtiers, rather than the usurpation of the throne.
Ives is the only scholar to explicitly suggest Elisabeth’s involvement in the Grey-Dudley
match by highlighting both the posthumous letter and the contemporary warrant for
wedding apparel.\textsuperscript{554}

Marian authorities laid the blame for the strengthened alliances resulting from the
Whitsun Weddings on John Dudley as part of his attempted usurpation of the English

\textsuperscript{550} The Parrs’ involvement in the Whitsun Weddings is discussed more fully in chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{551} Their activity is presented in chapter 2, and discussed in chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{552} I would like to thank Prof. Ralph Houlbrooke for generously taking time to debate these issues with me.
\textsuperscript{553} Ives, \textit{Lady Jane Grey}, 153.
\textsuperscript{554} Ibid. 187; BL Royal MS 8 C XXIV, ff. 340v, 363v, Warrant for apparel for the Whitsun Weddings, April
1553 and \textit{The chronicle of Queen Jane}, [ref. 1553/4].
throne through his son and daughter-in-law, and future grandchildren. It must be noted that the original stipulation of Edward VI’s Device was that the throne would pass from Edward to Jane Grey’s heirs, not Jane herself. In this scenario Dudley would arguably have had greater influence over the future monarch/monarchy, as if Jane had had a son by her husband, Guildford Dudley, then the ruling dynasty would be Dudleys. In August 1553 the Habsburg ambassadors explained the scapegoat situation, ‘it was thought best not to inquire too closely into what had happened, so as to make no discoveries that might prejudice those [who tried the duke].’ The evidence actually confirms the involvement of a number of Edwardian nobles in a dual-gendered socio-political network involving Elisabeth Parr. If the Whitsun Weddings were celebrated in order to position Jane Grey to take the throne supported by a network of prominent nobles and courtiers bound together by kinship, the sensitivity of this political agenda would account for the lack of irrefutable evidence of such a plot. Either communication would have happened in person, or via trusted messengers/intermediaries. Any written correspondence would almost certainly have been burnt. The extant documents that discuss the political engagement happening at and around Chelsea Manor c. 1547/1548 (as above) illustrate the extent to which the members of this community were frequenting each others’ residences, exchanging information and carrying messages for each other, and the interplay between more junior members of the households. The Parrs’ account book for spring-summer 1553 highlights the interactions between the leading members of the Jane Grey coup. William Parr lent money to Henry Grey, duke of Suffolk; Thomas Cobham, Elisabeth’s brother and husband of Catherine Cavendish, Sir William’s daughter by his first marriage, was a frequent visitor to the Parrs’ home, and significantly, Elisabeth Parr herself socialised and associated with men such as Robert Dudley, Guilford’s brother, the Northumberlands’ third son, and the lord deputy of Ireland, James Croft. Elisabeth’s role in the politics of spring-summer 1553 highlights two key exhibitions of agency: her involvement in brokering the marriage between Jane Grey and Guildford Dudley, and her work to keep Queen Jane on the throne once there. What is subject to debate is whether Elisabeth knew of the plot to overthrow Mary during Edward’s final illness, and whether she actively supported Jane’s claim over the claims of Mary and Elizabeth Tudor prior to Edward VI’s death. Whatever the intended outcome of the weddings, however, Elisabeth’s involvement with Jane Grey and Guildford Dudley and

556 CSP Span., xi. 203-4, Ambassadors to Charles V, 4 Sept. 1553.
557 TNA E101/520/9, ff. 7-11.
the evidence of the Parrs’ socio-political network highlights her political engagement at the highest level of later Edwardian court politics and the significance of kinship networks extending beyond the nuclear family. Whether or not Elisabeth’s focus was on securing her and William’s future in an alternative scenario to the Marian accession, her kinship to Henry Herbert provides reason enough for her to take an interest in significant alliances formed by the Whitsun Weddings.

**Summary points**

This chapter has sought to highlight that across the reign of Edward VI Elisabeth Parr established herself as a woman of means and intelligence who knew how best to operate in order to be successful at court. Elisabeth took care that her activity was beyond reproach and not worthy of speculation or unfavourable notice and she was close enough to the central government of the English court to act on her own behalf or communicate in person with those from whom she needed help. What is clear from the surviving evidence, however, is that on occasion Elisabeth was recognised and comfortably acted as the first lady of the English court from her public debut as marchioness of Northampton c. March 1550 until the accession of Queen Mary in July 1553, and that even before her official embodiment of the role, her influence can be seen in the political interplay of those around her. Elisabeth’s activity, and the evidence of it, falls into two distinct sections during this period - before her recognition as Parr’s wife and marchioness of Northampton, 1547-1550 and afterwards, c. 1550-1553. In the earlier period all of her activity has to be inferred as the only evidence of her presence at or near the court comes from references to her in official documents such as acts of the privy council. Her presence should be reintegrated into the existing narrative, however, as motives and networks alter with her inclusion. Distinguishing Elisabeth as a motivating factor in the mid-Edwardian turbulence acknowledges the (indirect) impact women had on the events of the reign. Recognising that Elisabeth’s agency and political engagement across the years 1547-1553 constituted a continuation and significant extension of her court career begun under Henry VIII begins to allow for and acknowledge the degree to which she and other women had legitimate political roles and authority and were political players during the reign of Edward VI.

The patterns of information sharing, petitioning and patronage activity as shown in evidence of the Chelsea Manor rival court and the fall out highlights the women’s continued participation in politics despite the lack of a Queen consort, and the power of
female friendship to have an impact on politically significant events that would become a key aspect of the operation of the early Elizabethan court. From March 1550 onwards when she was a recognised public figure, the extant evidence of Elisabeth’s agency and inhabittance of the role of marchioness of Northampton is a well-documented performance. The variety of evidence extant that documents Parr’s career as first lady of the court is broad including Hoby’s diary and *The Book of the Courtyer*, an account book and diplomatic and personal correspondence, including two of only three holograph letters by Elisabeth that survive. Elisabeth’s involvement in the events leading up to and during the brief reign of Queen Jane attest to her willingness and ability to involve herself in the politics of the Edwardian period, in a previously unacknowledged way. In this regard, Elisabeth’s activity and the amount of evidence documenting it highlights the extent to which the political significance of women at and around the Edwardian court is under-recognised.

What the evidence discussed above substantiates is that Elisabeth was a member of a network of noblewomen active at and around the court of Edward VI. The lack of official employment for the women at court that led to their removal from the physical location of the court itself destabilised the court’s governance by drawing the council away from the presence of the young King. Elisabeth’s personal importance to William Parr and the rejection of their right to marry by the privy council under Edward Seymour influenced Parr to join forces with John Dudley to usurp Seymour’s authority. Following the deaths of Katherine Parr and Thomas, Edward and Anne Seymour, Elisabeth took on a quasi-consort role as one of the leading public women in England, but drew lessons from the hostility that Anne Seymour faced, masterminding her public image and reputation through the subtle but pronounced means of a literary translation. From her position of power and influence she was introduced, or introduced herself, as a political player on the European stage by associating with a variety of embassies and ambassadors, which contributed to her success as a politician under Elizabeth I. The consequences of her role as a dynastic marriage broker would have altered the course of English history, had Mary not succeeded in deposing Jane. Despite the failure of this ultimate example of Elisabeth’s operation as a female courtier, it is a fitting pinnacle to the first phase of her court career, as a clear indication of the extent to which she functioned and was recognised as a woman of political influence at the court of Edward VI.
Chapter 4: Political Protestants and female networks, 1553-1558

On 3 August 1558 Mary Tudor entered the city of London to take up her throne and was royally conducted to the Tower of London.\textsuperscript{558} Jane Dudley née Grey was declared a usurper and imprisoned in the Tower of London, where two weeks earlier she had been named Queen herself.\textsuperscript{559} The men and women who had held power at the court of Edward VI and had supported Jane’s claim to the throne found their situations similarly altered. John Dudley, duke of Northumberland and William Parr, marquess of Northampton joined Jane and her husband, Guilford Dudley in the Tower. Jane Dudley, duchess of Northumberland, Frances Grey, duchess of Suffolk (who had been so briefly Queen mother), Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton and the other women who had accompanied Jane to the Tower as her fledgling court either fled the Tower before Mary arrived or were released.\textsuperscript{560} Being free, though, did not mean they could return to the lives they had led before Mary’s accession. In fact, with the accession to the throne of England of Mary Tudor, England’s first crowned Queen regnant, many things were different. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a consideration of the role of the female courtier or the privy chamber under Mary as Queen regnant, or under Mary and Philip’s dual monarchy, as the focus remains on Elisabeth Parr whose particular circumstances removed her from court for the duration of Mary’s reign. This chapter presents Elisabeth during the reign of Mary, focusing on her socio-political and kinship networks in order to establish the extent to which her behaviour shows a continuation of her strategies of operation and agency seen around the court of Edward VI.

The scholarly context

Of the five Tudor monarchs, Mary Tudor has received the worst press. The epithet ‘Bloody Mary’ has dominated her reputation for more than four centuries, and her reign has been almost universally characterised as a failure. As explored below, not until relatively recently have scholars re-evaluated the reign and given Mary and her regime the full complement of impartial revision and presentation. Scholarship on the reign of Mary Tudor maintains a dichotomy between biographical and thematic research. The former is almost universally concerned solely with the Queen herself - a refreshing change from the ‘great man school of history’ that long predominated in the reign of Edward VI, where the

\textsuperscript{558} Whitelock,\textit{ Mary Tudor}, 180.
\textsuperscript{559} Ives,\textit{ Lady Jane Grey}, 241-7.
\textsuperscript{560} Ibid.
focus was primarily on Dudley and Seymour. Scholarly preoccupation with Mary, however, has meant that although her ‘womanhood’ supposedly defined her reign - and contributed to its failures - what the accession of a Queen regnant meant for other women has not as yet been satisfactorily considered. The literature considered here is discussed and highlighted in order to present the scholarly context for the chapter that follows.

In his 1989 article on the reign of Mary Tudor, David Loades - arguably the key scholar on Mary’s reign - provides an elegant review of trends and highlights of Marian historiography from the age of Elizabeth to the late twentieth century. From Foxe’s Book of Martyrs c. 1570 to J. A. Froude in the early nineteenth century, historiography of Mary’s reign was ‘rooted in religious apologetics’ according to Loades, and Mary herself seen as a ‘sad and gentle’ creature, whose Catholicism and pro-Spanish agenda gave contemporaries and later scholars ample opportunity to discredit her queenship. Mary was almost always perceived as a tragic figure, whether the flaws were of nature or nurture. After Froude, twentieth-century greats like A. F. Pollard followed suit, chastising Mary for forcing the realm to move against the tide of thinking and progress taking place across Europe, of which Elizabeth I was later a key proponent.

The twentieth century produced a female dominated and romanticised tradition of Marian biography including J. M. Stone’s Mary the first, Queen of England (London, 1901) and Beatrice White’s Mary Tudor (London, 1935). Later came Milton Waldman’s The Lady Mary (London, 1972), Jasper Ridley’s Mary Tudor (London, 1973) and Carolly Erikson’s Bloody Mary (London, 1978). Until Loades’ work in the late 1980s/90s, the standard ‘life’ of Mary Tudor was Helen Prescott’s 1940 The Spanish Tudor, revised in 1952 and reissued posthumously in 2003. Prescott’s presentation of Mary has her as an often misguided, ill-advised and undermined Queen, battling against her country as she had always fought against her circumstances. Nevertheless she was passionate with intense conviction that her faith and her queenship were worth fighting for. Prescott’s mid-century Mary recombined the historical and biographical traditions, reconciling Mary the woman and Mary the Queen. Of particular significance to this thesis, Prescott is also one of the only

---

562 Ibid. 548.
scholars of Mary’s reign to pay any particular attention to Elisabeth and the Cobham family’s role in upsetting the Marian regime.\(^{565}\)

David Loades has for over half a century been the dominant scholarly voice pressing for full consideration of Mary and her reign. *Two Tudor Conspiracies* (1965) contextualised the Wyatt rebellion, and *The Oxford Martyrs* (1970) presented the reign’s religious context. His original biography from his *Life* of Mary (1989) was edited and reissued to form the 2006 *Tragical History* of the Queen and revised again for 2012’s *Mary Tudor*. Loades’ impressive bibliography of Marian historiography has spearheaded the revision and debate over Mary’s reign.\(^{566}\) On the subject of Mary’s unpopular policies regarding the restoration of Catholicism, Loades suggests that the greatest irony and difficulty that destabilised Mary’s Queenship was that ‘the English Church could only be restored to a semblance of the true faith by the authority which the Queen most entirely deplored, that of the Royal Supremacy.’\(^{567}\) That is, Mary could only exert the authority to return England to Catholicism against Edward VI’s reformations by taking upon herself the authority that her father, Henry VIII had gained by breaking with the Catholic Church and rejecting the superior authority of the Pope. Arguably by doing this, though, Mary might echo her father is his earlier years, when he had defended the Catholic church and the papacy against Luther, and earned himself the title *defensor fidei*.\(^{568}\)

Beginning late last century, there has been a major revision in scholarship on Mary and her reign. Edited collections such as Jennifer Loach and Robert Tittler’s *The Mid-Tudor Polity* took radical steps to integrate the Marian period into the context of the mid-Tudor century as a whole and mediate what mid-century historians such as Neale and Pollard presented as schisms between Church and parliament. Loach’s own essay highlights the cooperation that took place between these two institutions across the turbulent mid-sixteenth century. Ann Weikel and Rex H. Pogson, too, suggested that both the privy council and

\(^{565}\) See, for example, GBLC’s involvement in the Wyatt rebellion, Prescott, 301-4.


\(^{567}\) Loades, *The Mid-Tudor Crisis*, 148.

the Marian clergy were less radically divided than had previously been indicated. Richards published on Mary’s unprecedented queenship in the 1990s and in her 2008 monograph she commented on the lack of positive and original scholarly attention that Mary’s reign had received. Richards claimed that Marian historiography had for centuries settled for repetition rather than reconsideration. Richards cast Mary’s queenship looking forward, highlighting the extent to which Mary’s reign was successful at setting precedents that Elizabeth could (and did) follow over the course of her far longer reign. Richards’ focus on Mary Tudor highlights the originality of her queenship, concluding that Mary’s reign ‘brought to the fore a series of novel constitutional issues, and produced some ingenious constitutional propositions.’

Glyn Redworth’s scholarship highlights the Habsburg/Spanish alliances ever present in Mary’s reign, not least through her marriage to Phillip II, whom Redworth described as ‘less than a king regent but more than a king consort [with a] unique position as “co-monarch” [that] vanished on the death of his barren Queen’ as a result of Philip’s unique status, ‘to a considerable extent our historical memory of his reign has vanished with it.’

Tackling Mary’s unprecedented queenship Redworth comments that although ‘in constitutional theory Mary lost none of her prerogatives on marriage, the acquisition of a husband did remove the most potent of her propaganda weapons: her purity.’

Like Richards, Anna Whitelock’s 2009 biography, Mary Tudor: England’s First Queen stemmed from her ‘desire to tell Mary’s remarkable story, to push her centre stage as England’s first Queen and bring her out from the shadow of her younger sister, Elizabeth.’ Gender is central to Whitelock’s discussion of Mary. She claims that ‘the contrast between Mary as Queen and the personal tragedy of Mary as a woman … is the key to understanding her life and reign.’ According to Whitelock, ‘the woman who emerges is a complex figure of immense courage and resolve, her dramatic life unfolding in the shadow of the great sixteenth-century struggle for power in Europe.’

---

572 Glyn Redworth, ‘“Matters Impertinent to Women”: Male and Female Monarchy under Philip and Mary’, The English Historical Review, Vol. 112, No. 447 (June, 1997) 597-613, 598.
573 Ibid. 599.
574 Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 357, 4.
England's Catholic Queen successfully manages to contextualise the Queen and her reign within a wider European and historiographical context by incorporating source material as broad as the abundant Habsburg political correspondence from the Archivo General de Simancas (usually only accessible to readers through the nineteenth century summarised translations in the CSP Spanish (Simancas)). Edwards’ Mary is a monarch before she is a woman, that is to say her gender is an aspect of her Queenship, but not the defining feature of her reign.575

Increasingly, Marian scholarship connects Mary’s Queenship and reign to her younger half-sister’s, with a view to identifying the extent to which Elizabeth was indebted to Mary, who as the first Queen regnant was the pathfinder.576 Scholars have highlighted the discrepancies between the Tudor Queens’ reigns, with Patrick Collinson for example arguing that the lengths of the reigns created such different circumstances that the situations in the realm upon their accessions are really incomparable, commenting that ‘if Mary had lived to be sixty, it is highly unlikely that a middle-aged Elizabeth, succeeding in about 1576, would have wished to alter a stable and well established situation’.577 Whitelock’s most recent work on Mary considers her Queenship alongside that of her sister Elizabeth in an edited collection presenting the sisters jointly and in context. Charlotte Merton’s essay is the only one in the collection that is concerned with women beyond the Queen herself, but still the focus is on friendship and personal attendance, rather than the kind of political significance through intimacy that is now an acknowledged part of Elizabeth’s Queenship.578 Merton’s essay builds upon the extensive and foundational research conducted for her 1991 thesis, the first to approach an adequate understanding of the political significance of Elizabethan women. Sadly it did not spark the same interest in women’s political agency at Mary’s court.579

Despite the apparent contrast in treatment that the effect of Mary’s gender on the formation of her court and the women of her household has received compared to that

578 As discussed in chapter 5.
focused on Elizabeth’s, the debate over the political significance of Mary’s privy chamber began concurrently with that of Elizabeth’s but has not generated anything like the scholarly interest. Assessing the ‘illusion of decline’ facing the privy chamber after the death of Henry VIII, John Murphy confirmed the continued political relevance of the privy chamber under Mary, but concluded that as all the privy chamber offices that had been most coveted ‘fell into the hands of women…. This effectively neutralized them.’ Simon Adams went further, claiming that the privy chamber under Mary was little more than a ‘glorified boudoir’ and so of no political importance. Anna Whitelock’s assessment of the restructuring of the household and the political significance of the privy chamber focused more on Mary’s continued use of the male members of her household as political intimates but does highlight the role of women within the informal political sphere. Whitelock argues that the privy chamber became a ‘predominantly female sanctum’ but included male intimates who had been in Mary’s household prior to her accession, so whose trusted intimacy with the Queen was more about loyalty and familiarity than gender. Whitelock asserts that the reshuffling of personnel and change of gender had wider implications for governance as under Henry VIII the monarch’s intimate body servants had increasingly become political players and that Mary’s gender ‘changed the rules of the political game.’ Further work needs to be done, therefore, on the full impact of this rule change and the political importance of the privy chamber and its female staff during the reign of Mary Tudor, particularly, perhaps, in the light of her marriage, and the effective reassertion of the traditionally structured court of a king and a queen.

Whitelock’s subsequent biography of the Queen pays limited attention to the wider female context of the Marian period, of either her courtiers or her enemies. Whitelock does make clear that from the onset of the reign the gender of the monarch necessitated changes to the structure of the court and household, with long-term Marian favourites such as Jane Dormer, Frances Jerningham and Susan Clarencius replacing Edward VI’s entourage as the Queen’s intimate attendants and suggests that ‘their positions close to the

580 Pam Wright was the first scholar to address this issue, see chapter 5 for the debate over the political important of the privy chamber under Elizabeth. In the same volume as Wright’s essay, John Murphy addressed the privy chamber under Edward and Mary: John Murphy, ‘The Illusion of Decline: the Privy Chamber, 1547-1558’, 119-146 in The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War ed. David Starkey (Longman: London, 1987).
581 Murphy, 140.
583 Whitelock, ‘A woman in a man’s world’, 326.
584 Ibid. 325.
585 Ibid.
Queen gave these women a measure of influence. Whitelock’s 2004 thesis on Mary’s pre-accession household and articles on Mary’s succession (one written jointly with Diarmaid MacCulloch) address the impact of Mary’s household and allies on her accession and early reign, highlighting that ‘Mary’s supporters in 1553 had a prehistory of considerable depth and scope’, but still focus almost exclusively on the role of men. Research on individual women who may have had significant political influence at Mary’s court such as Jane Dormer, later countess of Feria and Lady Anne Bacon are the focus of current scholarship. It is hopeful, then, that the network of women and female courtiers who had access to Queen Mary will in due course receive the same attention that Elizabeth’s privy chamber has in recent years.

The field of scholarship extending beyond the figure of the Queen herself has been located in the wider context of the Tudor dynasty, European politics and religious tension, with later twentieth century scholarship more sympathetically reassessing Mary’s government and governance, contextualising her unpopular policies in the politics of Continental Europe and incorporating the impact of a failed harvest and epidemic disease as contributing to the demoralisation of the realm c. 1557-8. Geoffrey Elton and John Guy’s surveys of the Tudor period present the middle years including Mary’s reign as transitional rather than defining periods in the long Tudor century. Other scholarship is predominantly thematic, focusing on, for example, the rebellions of Mary’s reign, or the national conflicts engendered by the counter-reformation Mary instigated upon her accession. E. M. Harbinson’s Rival Ambassadors at the Court of Mary, Eric Simons’ The Queen and the Rebel and Eamon Duffy’s various works on the religious turbulence of Mary’s reign - Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor (2009) and Saints, Sacrilege and Sedition: Religion and conflict in the Tudor Reformations (2012) are examples of this type. There is a considerable scholarly focus, then, on the so-called Protestant Marian Martyrs - Foxe’s heroes - including from established scholars like Thomas S. Freeman and Andrew Pettegree. Emergent scholars are beginning to look beyond the traditionally defined themes and boundaries of early modern historiography - literature, religion and politics - and explore alternative, interdisciplinary themes such as Ruth Ahnert’s work on the prison writing of

---

586 Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 183.
587 Whitelock and MacCulloch, 268.
the Marian Protestants and martyrs, which has revealed complicated epistolary patronage networks and cultures of correspondence.\textsuperscript{590} As well as Mary’s queenship being considered alongside her sister’s, the dual monarchy of Mary and Philip is coming under increasing scrutiny - as in Harry Kelsey’s \textit{Philipp II King of England}, which attempts to characterise Philip as England’s ‘forgotten sovereign’ and Alexander Samson’s essay drawn from his doctoral thesis.\textsuperscript{591}

A survey of existing Marian scholarship serves to highlight the trends in historiography that have defined debate about the significance of Mary’s reign and counter-reformation, and suggests aspects of the reign that remain inadequately considered, such as the role of women at and around the Marian court. There is no existing literature that provides a comprehensive overview or analysis of what happened to those who had been prominent during the Edwardian reign but who then had no place at court under Queen Mary. This includes the out of favour former courtiers - male and female - who should be studied by scholars as their continued activity in opposition to the monarch shaped Mary’s reign. Continuity of the personnel operating at the Edwardian and Elizabethan courts needs to be acknowledged and their activity under Mary entered into the narrative. Of most concern for this thesis is the lacuna in Marian scholarship where the activity of Elisabeth and her female associates should be. This chapter presents Elisabeth as she recovered from the failure to place Jane Grey on the throne, maintained and formed socio-political alliances away from the confines of the Marian regime and positioned herself to help her friend and confidante Elizabeth Tudor as she waited and anticipated her queenship.

\textbf{Establishing Elisabeth - Status and identity during the reign of Mary I}

Although the extant documentation and material evidence presented in chapter 2 allows for a partial reconstruction and a fruitful evaluation of Elisabeth Parr’s life and activity during the reign of Mary Tudor, far less evidence survives that attests to or documents her life and activity across the years 1553-1558 than either of the other reigns


addressed in this thesis. The documents that are extant are as revealing of Elisabeth’s circumstances and activity by their nature as through their content. The surviving documents can be loosely categorised as official documents, court and personal. The official documents - the 1554 warrant from Queen Mary regarding the vase, and the 1553/4 inventories of the Parrs’ possessions - give indications of Elisabeth’s circumstances at the moments they attest to, such as the terms used to refer to her, and the Parrs’ legal position. The court documents - ambassadorial dispatches and Queen Mary’s letter to Waldegrave regarding Elisabeth’s claim to land - provide information about key events in and impacting on her life, such as the conditions on which William Parr received his pardon for his role in putting Queen Jane on Mary’s throne. Personal documents (including correspondence and wills, although these do cross over with legal or official documents) include Jane Dudley’s will and Edward Courtenay’s letter to George Brooke, Lord Cobham.

Elisabeth’s material situation after Mary’s accession was affected by several factors: her previous relationship with Mary; the unorthodox nature of her marriage to William Parr; and a set of unfortunate coincidences. Across Mary’s reign Elisabeth’s status and circumstances were consistently more complicated than William Parr’s. Upon his release from the Tower following the Wyatt rebellion, Parr was restored as a knight of the realm, meaning that he held some property and could gain honours or hold office - even if none were likely to be granted to him. Elisabeth, however, had no title nor right to one. As Mary had rescinded the Act of Parliament that had declared Elisabeth and William’s union legal based on the findings of the Edwardian commission in 1548/9 Elisabeth was not even entitled to call herself ‘Lady Parr’ as if she were William’s wife, whatever his status, even though Anne Bourchier was not using or claiming the title. Elisabeth was left in a

592 Of the 110 discrete documents presented in this thesis 8 date from the reign of Henry VIII, 27 from the reign of Edward VI, 60 from the reign of Elizabeth and only 13 from Mary’s reign. See appendix c.
593 SP 11/4 f. 28 (stamped 25) Warrant to pay Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton, 25 June 1554; TNA E154/2/40, Inventory from Westmorland, 1553; TNA E154/2/45, Inventory of the Parrs’ household and belongings taken from Essex, 1553-4 and TNA LR2/18, Accounts of the Parrs’ goods, chattels and landholdings confiscated by the crown, 1553-4.
594 CSP Span., 1553, the Ambassadors to Emperor Charles V, 24 July 1553; CSP Span., 1553, the Ambassadors to Emperor Charles V, 27 July 1553; CSP Span., 1553, the Ambassadors to Emperor Charles V, 27 August 1553 and SP 11/12 f. 47 (stamped 100), Queen Mary to Edward Waldegrave and others, 5 March 1558.
595 TNA PROB 11/37/0 f. 274, Will of Jane Dudley, duchess of Northumberland, c. 1554/5 and SP 11/5 f. 132 (stamped 36), Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon to George Brooke, Lord Cobham, 20 July 1555.
597 Anne Bourchier, William Parr's first wife, petitioned Mary to prevent William facing execution in 1553. When Parr’s marriage to Anne had been legally dissolved in 1543 the terms were that neither she nor any of her children could inherit any of Parr’s lands, nor any of the lands that had formed part of her father's
strange state, something akin to the wife of a churchman who had married as was allowed under the reformed church of Edward VI, but was forced to put aside his wife when the rules of Catholicism were reinstated upon Mary’s accession. She was, as David Starkey remarked, ‘in limbo: she was a wife who was not a wife; she was also a marchioness who was not a marchioness, as Mary had stripped her husband of his titles as well as his spouse.’

Elisabeth lost the legal status and right to respect for the rank that she had secured for herself in the ten years she had spent at and around the courts of Henry VIII and Edward VI, c. 1543-1553. Despite her dramatic fall, however, Elisabeth’s position was more favourable than it could have been. She was not the widow of an executed traitor, as was the case by March 1554 for many of the women with whom she had closely associated in Edward’s reign. That said, Elisabeth’s change in circumstances was significant. Inventories of the Parrs’ properties in Essex, Kendal and London highlight how much Elisabeth lost through crown confiscation, following her own and William Parr’s participation in the coup to replace Mary with Jane Grey as England’s Queen.

It is noteworthy that in both E154/2/40 and E154/2/45, the inventories of the Parrs’ goods and households from Kendal and Essex, officially documenting their change in circumstances, Elisabeth is still referred to as ‘Lady Marques’. William, conversely, is referred to as ‘the late Lorde Marques of Northampton’, and E154/2/40 is headed ‘An Inventorie of all the goodes of the L marques off Northampton attaynted in the Countrie of Westmorland’. These documents present an apparent contrast between the terms of reference for Elisabeth and her husband upon his attainder. References to Elisabeth as Lady Marques or Lady Marquis might suggest that she continued to be held in the earldom of Essex that had passed to Parr on their marriage and after her father’s death. If Parr were executed for treason all the lands that Anne had brought to their marriage and subsequently inherited would be forfeit to the crown. As it stood, following her dismissal by Parr for adultery Anne had remained in contact with Mary, and Anne was at court in an unspecified position for the length of Mary’s reign. Along with Susan Clarencieux, one of Mary’s senior female courtiers, Anne petitioned Mary to save Parr’s life, in order to protect her own inheritance. Despite Anne’s intentions Mary returned the legal state of affairs to that secured by her father, Henry VIII, in 1543 meaning that Anne’s property was still forfeit on account of her proven adultery. Mary allowed Anne Bourchier first an annuity of £100 in December 1553, and secondly an additional annuity of £450 in December 1556 along with the right to style herself Anne, Viscountess Bourchier, presumably in order to disassociate herself from the disgraced Parr.

598 Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 209.
599 Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset had been executed in February 1552, John Dudley, duke of Northumberland was executed for his role in Jane Grey’s usurpation in October 1553 and Henry Grey, duke of Suffolk was executed for his role in both his daughter’s usurpation and suspected support for Wyatt’s rebellion in March 1554. This left Anne Seymour, Jane Dudley and Frances Brandon widows, although Jane Dudley did not long survive her husband. The other two ladies married again to men far below their former ducal ranks, as highlighted in chapter 5.
600 TNA E154/2/40, Inventory of the Parrs’ goods at Kendal, Westmorland, Aug. 1553 - April 1554; and TNA E154/2/45 and TNA E154/2/39, Inventories of the Parr’s goods in Easton, Essex and Kent, some of which were brought to the Tower for Parr’s use upon his arrest, some sold and others given to Elisabeth Parr. TNA LR2/118 is also a survey of the Parrs’ goods and chattels confiscated by the early Marian regime.
appropriate esteem for her rank prior to Mary’s accession and Parr’s arrest and was not considered to deserve the same loss of favour, although it would have been more accurate for her also to be referred to as ‘late’ marchioness. It is possible that the record keepers simply did not know what to call her, but calling her by a title that she had been legally stripped of in an official document would seem a risky or surprising move.

It is worth considering how Elisabeth is referred to in all of the surviving documents that attest to her activity during the reign of Mary Tudor, as the discrepancies in terms of reference seem significant in terms of how Elisabeth was viewed by her contemporaries as Mary’s reign progressed. In 1553, the Habsburg ambassador, Scheefve identified Elisabeth as ‘the daughter of Lord Cobham’, so avoiding giving her name or status other than that associated with her father because of her questionable marital status. The same mode of reference is used later by Jane Dudley in her will where she bequeaths items to ‘Elisabeth daughter of Lord Cobham’. Because of her own situation Jane Dudley would have been eminently aware of the political and social ambiguities surrounding Elisabeth and her status at the time. By associating Elisabeth with her natal family Jane’s mode of reference highlights Elisabeth’s powerful kin while disassociating her from her treasonous spouse. Simultaneously, however, by not referring to her as Mistress Elisabeth Cobham/Brooke as rendered elsewhere, Jane does not actually deny Elisabeth’s claim to the title of marchioness of Northampton, or more accurately Lady Parr as she would be as Parr’s wife c. 1555. The emphasis on kinship and lack of a husband again allows Elisabeth a kind of autonomy to receive these possessions into her own hands as a personal bequest, without the risk that they would be subject to laws of couverture or attainder. Juxtaposed to these carefully ambiguous references are those that give Elisabeth more status and respect that she was technically allowed. The most surprising of these is the 1554 warrant from Mary requesting that the marchioness of Northampton be reimbursed for a jasper vase bought for her own or possibly Edward VI’s use when William Parr had been on embassy to France in 1551 and that had since apparently found its way into the Queen’s possession. Here Elisabeth is referred to as ‘our right trusty and right welbelovid Cousen the Marchioness of Northampton’. Unquestionably this document refers to Elisabeth, because despite technically and legally being William Parr’s wife, Anne Bourchier never had

---

601 Elsewhere it was suggested that Parr obtained a pardon by conspiring with the Spanish ambassador himself. According to Harbison, ‘Dubois had passed on to his master a ridiculous piece of gossip to the effect that Renard had obtained a pardon for Northumberland’s accomplice, the Marquis of Northampton, and had received a gift of plate as a token of Northampton’s gratitude - a story which added fuel to the flames of Scheefve’s jealousy.’ Harbison, 74.

602 SP 11/4 f. 28 (stamped 25), Warrant to pay EPMoN, 16 June 1554 [badly defaced].
a claim to the title of marchioness of Northampton. Legally in 1554, however, neither did Elisabeth, so it is astonishing to find her being referred to in so favourable terms in an official document originating with the Queen herself. The timing of the document - barely four months after the Wyatt rebellion - is also surprising. Why Elisabeth would then be reimbursed for a vase bought years before is mysterious; the document is certainly anomalous, but it seems to call into question the assumption that she was not welcome at the court of Mary I. It is possible that the vase was gifted by Elisabeth to Mary, but why she would be reimbursed for a gift is curious. Although Elisabeth had certainly known the Queen since 1545, there is no evidence that they were close, nor were they kin (as Elisabeth was with Elizabeth Tudor) except by marriage through Katherine Parr. As Mary had by this time dissolved Elisabeth's marriage to William Parr the cousinage claimed in the warrant must be rhetorical rather than literal and so hinting at an anomalous degree of favour awarded to Elisabeth personally by the Queen, which cannot at this time be contextualised or explained.

Elisabeth is referred to nearly as respectfully in a glancing reference in a commendation by Edward Courtenay, earl of Devon to George Brooke, Lord Cobham from July 1555. The content of the letter - that Courtenay had been offered a horse as a gift from Lord Cobham - is fairly inconsequential, but does suggest that Lord Cobham was taking steps and making an effort to reintegrate and ingratiate himself with the leading lights of the Marian regime following his family's involvement in Wyatt's rebellion the previous year. Courtenay was one of few male claimants or heirs to Mary's throne, and a possible suitor for her hand prior to her marriage to Philip of Spain. He and his family were also longstanding associates of the Cobhams and Elisabeth's brother, Henry, then had a place in Courtenay's household. The key point of interest here is that Courtenay closes the letter with a formulaic request that his commendations be passed to ‘my lady your wife and my lady your daughter’. Although a common salutation, the circumstances of the Cobham family at this point make the mode of reference worthy of note. The Cobhams

603 BL Harley MS 283, f. 176, John Wilkins to GBLC, 30 November 1545 makes reference to Elisabeth serving at Henry VIII’s court alongside the then Princess Mary.
604 This document is very badly damaged and difficult to read even in the original so my interpretation (such as it is) is based to a degree on the nineteenth century identification of the document in the Calendar. Dr Nadine Akkerman has suggested an alternative reading of this document as relating to a vase bought for Mary, Queen of Scots who was Dauphine of France in 1551 when William Parr was on embassy. This is an interesting line to explore, but still problematic in terms of explaining why Elisabeth was reimbursed for the vase in 1554, whoever had possession of the item. My thanks to Dr Akkerman for engaging in this discussion.
605 Venn, I, 361; HC to Thomas Wilson, December 1580, A Collection of Letters, ed. L. Howard, (1753) 352-54.
606 SP 11/5 f. 132 (Stamped 36), ECEoD to GBLC, 20 July 1555.
had four daughters, Elisabeth the eldest, Mary, Anne and Catherine. Nothing is known of Mary - it is possible she died as a child. At least one, likely Anne but maybe Catherine, travelled with Lord and Lady Cobham when they moved abroad to Calais when Cobham held the role of Deputy. In 1555, however, Mary and Anne were dead and Catherine, aged only 11, was probably not yet married. Catherine’s eventual marriage was to John Jerningham, connected to the court through his uncle, Henry Jerningham who was a long-term loyal adherent of Mary Tudor, and then serving as Vice-Chamberlain of the Queen’s Household. If it had already taken place Catherine’s marriage would have been politically advantageous in terms of allying the tenuously loyal Cobham family to one high in Mary’s favour, but would not have given Catherine the status to be referred to as ‘my lady’, particularly not by an earl. Elisabeth, on the other hand, when marchioness of Northampton would technically have outranked Courtenay, despite his royal blood. This letter, then, suggests that Courtenay was still referring to - so essentially treating - Elisabeth with the dignity due to a marchioness, despite the fact that she would then have had no technical entitlement to that mode of address. There is evidence of a connection between the Cobham family and the Courtenays - Elisabeth’s younger brother, Henry, served in Courtenay’s household and upon his release from the Tower of London, Courtenay had come into possession of a substantial amount of William Parr’s possessions, although this does not necessarily indicate favour as this was likely not Parr’s own doing. If Elisabeth’s marital status was considered widely to be that of a single woman with no connection to Parr, as Mary intended when in October 1553 she revoked the Northampton Divorce Act of 1552, she would have been Mistress Cobham, not ‘my lady’; but, having been married she could not entirely return to the single state. Those away from the inner-workings of the court had less knowledge or awareness of or interest in the technicalities and issues of Elisabeth’s legal and marital status, and would still have known Elisabeth, or viewed her, as William Parr’s wife, whether or not they were marquess and marchioness.

It seems, then, that Elisabeth avoided much of the negative association of Parr’s attainder and took steps to reclaim some of the status and prestige she had technically lost through Parr’s actions and Mary’s laws. Using the legal loophole created by her ambiguous

---

607 One of the Cobham daughters, probably Anne, was recorded as seeking needles from England when resident in Calais with her parents. LP, XXI, I, 132, Stephen Vaughan to GBLC, 26 February 1546.
608 Burke, 77, and BL Add. MS 37666, f. 35.
609 When writing to Thomas Wilson, then an Elizabethan privy councillor Henry Cobham claimed that his father had secured him a position in Courtenay’s household so that when Elizabeth acceded to the throne she would find him ‘in place to her lykinge’; December 1580, A Collection of Letters, ed. L. Howard, (1753) 352-54; a number of the Parrs’ belongings taken from their property in Essex were given to Courtenay, then newly released from the Tower, TNA E154/2/45.
status, Elisabeth petitioned Queen Mary for restitution of some of the lands that had been
forfeit to the crown upon Parr’s attainder in 1553. Rents on the lands were collected by the
Parrs’ steward until William’s arrest, with no clear demarcation that they had been enfeoffed to Elisabeth.\textsuperscript{610} The lands seem to have been taken by the crown upon Parr’s
attainder, as part of his estate. Elisabeth claimed the lands back, however, because they had
not been married when William enfeoffed property to her and used her maiden name.\textsuperscript{611}
The terms of the dissolution of the Parrs’ marriage in October 1553 stated that it had never
existed.\textsuperscript{612} If the marriage never existed and Elisabeth was never Parr’s wife, property
bestowed on her as a single woman never reverted to his ownership and would legally have
remained her property, independent of Parr’s circumstances. The only surviving records
supporting this scenario relate to the manors of Halstead and Stansted in Essex, the lands
referred to in the letter from Mary to Edward Waldegrave from March 1558 suggesting
that Elisabeth had made a claim.\textsuperscript{613} Mary made a grant to Stephen Hadnoll, groom of the
privy chamber of land, including the land ‘all in Stansted, Essex, parcel of the possession of
William, Marquess of Northampton, attained, and demesne lands of his manor of
Stanstead; except the mansion house…’ and ‘the lordship and manor of Clavering Lucas
Pitchardes, Essex, part of the manor of Halstead, late part of the lands of William,
Marquess of Northampton, attainted.’\textsuperscript{614} The land was not part of those lands ‘of William’,
because since 1547 the lands had been for the ‘use of the said marquess and Elizabeth
Cobham, daughter of George Brooke, knight, Lord Cobham for the term of the life of the
said Elizabeth.’\textsuperscript{615} When Elisabeth appealed the lands’ redistribution, Mary conceded

\begin{quote}
the late Marques of Northampton made a graunte unto Elizabeth Cobham of
certeyn landes which upon thatteyndor of the sayd Marques cam unto our
handes, and therupon we dispersed the keping or possession of sundry
parcels thereof to certeyn of our servauntes / undresta

\end{quote}
understanding more that the sayd
Elizabeth pretendeth some right and tytel to the same landes by ordre and
construction of our Lawes.\textsuperscript{616}

\textsuperscript{610} TNA E101/520/9 ff. 1-3.
\textsuperscript{611} CPR I, Edward VI pt. 1 [roll. 799] vol. 1 [July 1547].
\textsuperscript{612} 1. Mar. Session 2, Private Act of Parliament ref. the Marquess of Northampton’s marriage confirmation,
repealed, c. 12, 1553.
\textsuperscript{613} SP 11/12 f. 47 (stamped 100), QM to Edward Waldegrave and others, 5 March 1558.
\textsuperscript{614} See SP 11/3 f. 86, Warrant for Grant to Stephen Hadnoll, 26 February 1554, SP 11/4 f. 7 (stamped 53),
Grant to Stephen Hadnoll, 5 March 1554 (copy of patent C66/772, original in Latin) and SP 11/5 f. 25
(stamped 25), Grant to Stephen Hadnoll, 27 May 1555 (copy of patent C66/886).
\textsuperscript{615} C66/799, Patent roll I Edward VI pt. 1 [1547?].
\textsuperscript{616} SP 11/12 f. 47 (stamped 100), QM to Edward Waldegrave and others, 5 March 1558.
Elisabeth was granted a pension for the first four years of Mary’s reign, and the first three years of Philip’s, which totalled celxii li iii s j d (£263 4s 1d).\textsuperscript{617} No evidence survives of Elisabeth’s strategem for achieving this compensation, or the extent of the effort that she, or someone at court had gone to to secure her suit. Elisabeth’s rise and fall in status as determined by her ‘husband’ and family’s loyalty or lack thereof to Mary’s crown are effectively bookended by her loss of all her land and property because of Parr’s attainder, and her recovery of her land rents. She began Mary’s reign as the wife of a convicted traitor and ended it as woman with income of her own, in her own name, due to her successful reclamation of her own property.

The only surviving document known to be extant that does refer to Elisabeth as ‘Mistress Elisabeth Cobham’ - that is directly by her maiden name rather than as kin to Lord Cobham - is the letter from Queen Mary to Edward Waldegrave requiring him to settle with Elisabeth over her claim to the Essex lands bestowed on her by Parr c. 1547. In this case the term of reference was a legal technicality not a social indicator and I believe it was a device of Elisabeth’s own agency. The lands that Parr had bestowed on Elisabeth in 1547 were as ‘Elisabeth Cobham, daughter of George Brooke, knight, Lord Cobham’,\textsuperscript{618} and it is this technicality that validates her claim. This document is the only surviving evidence attesting to Elisabeth’s reclamation of her lands, and it does not reveal whether she herself initiated the claim or whether the restoration of Elisabeth’s lands was instigated by someone else. The most likely scenario is that Elisabeth herself claimed that her lands had been taken from her, and that she did so under her maiden name, or at least in the name of her father, and therefore was choosing to present herself in association with her natal family, as will be further explored below. When collected together, then, the surviving evidence suggests that Elisabeth’s circumstances, or rather the attitude of the Marian regime towards her, were not as negative as has been previously viewed. The technical or legal difficulties inherent in her marital situation were neatly sidestepped because although she was not William Parr’s wife, according to Henry VIII’s last settlement on the issue, neither was Anne, Viscountess Bourchier, as Mary herself acknowledged.\textsuperscript{619} By associating

\textsuperscript{617} A substantial sum of money, approximating to £52, 775 c. 2005. This document is catalogued in the state papers as SP12/37 (stamped 145) as lands belonging to the late marchioness of Northampton, [Sept. 1565] but it appears to be either the original from c. March 1558 as per Mary’s instructions to Waldegrave, or a contemporary copy of the same.

\textsuperscript{618} CPR Edward VI, pt. 1 [roll 799] Vol. 1 [July 1547].

\textsuperscript{619} The Act that repealed Parr’s marriage to Elisabeth returned his marriage to Anne to the state of separation established in 1543 by Henry VIII. Anne Bourchier petitioned Mary for Parr’s release from the Tower; Mary allowed Anne Bourchier first an annuity of £100 in December 1553, and secondly an additional annuity of £450 in December 1556 along with the right to style herself Anne, Viscountess Bourchier, presumably in
Elisabeth with her father’s baronetcy Elisabeth was disassociated from William Parr both in terms of marriage and also alleged treason, but she was not actually forced to suffer the indignity of being treated as Parr’s former mistress and denied any status as a wife, even if she were the wife of an alleged traitor. Elisabeth’s circumstances across the years 1553-1558 were complex and changeable, but the few surviving pieces of evidence present a nuanced portrait of her activity, and attitudes towards her across Mary’s reign. Although circumstantial, the careful and deliberate manner in which Elisabeth was referred to during the reign of Mary Tudor - by her friends and associates and the creators of official records - might be indicative of Elisabeth’s wider public reputation and personal social standing as distinct from her husband and to an extent also her father and family. She was not associated with her husband’s or family’s perceived misdemeanours against Mary’s regnal authority (i.e. the Wyatt rebellion or usurpation by Queen Jane), but the peculiarities of her legal/marital situation prevented her holding a significant position in her own right. Despite this it appears that she did not entirely lose the socio-political authority that she had established for herself during her time as marchioness of Northampton and as high ranking female courtier at the Edwardian court.

Strategic friendships - socio-political networks, kinship and women’s influence beyond the court of Mary Tudor

Chapter 3 highlighted the restructuring of the Edwardian court due to Elisabeth and her associates’ situation outside the confines of the King’s residence and the formation of a satellite network of residences encircling and, to an extent, rivalling the court. These circumstances culminated in a strong female element of the nobility actively participating in activities such as marriage brokering, which took on increased political significance because of the young king’s death, and those women associated with Jane Grey’s brief occupation of the throne bore the consequences alongside (although actually removed from) their husbands. That Elisabeth was not arrested along with her husband, William, after Mary deposed Jane in July 1553, might suggest that Queen Mary deemed her not to have had any responsibility for enacting the coup against her. Alternatively this could be an example of Mary’s *realpolitik*. Mary’s extensive privy council as formed in the earliest days of her reign highlights her pragmatic approach to punishment and clemency for those whose loyalty could be earned and whose skills could be used. The evidence of Elisabeth’s marriage brokering suggests that she might - however inadvertently - have been one of those whose

---

620 See, for example, Whitelock, ‘A woman in a man’s world’, 323-34 and Whitelock and MacCulloch, 265-87.
activity enabled the coup to take place, by being one of the engineers of the marriage between Jane Grey and Guildford Dudley. If so she bore some responsibility for tethering the 16-year-old Jane to the ambition of John Dudley, duke of Northumberland. David Loades argues that Edward’s Device for the Succession - which meant that the claim of Lady Jane Grey and her heirs to the throne superseded that of his sisters Mary and Elizabeth - was written in or before January 1553 as an exercise in political thinking for a young King coming to his full powers, both intellectually and politically. If so it was not written by a desperate, dying monarch keen to ensure the continuity of the religious settlement he had fought for. It was written long before anyone at the court - the King and Dudley included - knew or felt that Edward was suffering from an illness any more consequential than a bad cold. In this scenario, it is unlikely that Dudley knew of the Device when he, and the King, were present at the Whitsun Weddings in May 1553. Once the weddings were conducted and Dudley’s family were aligned with Jane’s claim to the throne, however, Dudley’s motivation to ensure the Device was followed increased significantly, and as already established, through their kinship and socio-political alliances the Parrs’ fortunes were linked to the Dudleys’. Elisabeth’s potential role in manoeuvering Jane into the position of Queen highlights how closely intertwined were dynastic and court or high politics, so quickly did a marriage alliance - and the potential rise of a new dynasty - mean a regime change.

That Elisabeth and her husband supported Queen Jane has already been established. Why is harder to definitively ascertain. What follows is an attempted reconstruction and discussion of the Parrs’ possible motives for their activity - including kinship, religion, personal circumstances - drawn from the extant evidence presented in chapter 2. As suggested above, many of the Parrs’ friends and allies, and to an extent, their kin, were part of the Dudley faction, which intended to implement Edward’s plan for the succession by substituting Lady Jane for Princess Mary, at least until it became clear that Mary was winning, when Lord Cobham changed sides. Religious conviction - that is support for a reformed church rather than a return to Catholicism - is a plausible motivation for the Parrs’ interest in keeping Mary from the throne. William Parr’s religious convictions during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI are well documented.

621 BL Royal MS 8 C XXIV, ff. 340v, 363v - Warrant for apparel for the Whitsun Weddings, April 1553; Strype, Annals of the Reformation, v. IV, 485 and Read, Mr Secretary, 94-5.
622 Loades, Intrigue and Treason, 120-124.
623 Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 173; CSP Span., 1553, the Ambassadors to Emperor Charles V, 24 July, 27 July and 27 August 1553.
624 Including in James, Catherine Parr, 160-1.
Elisabeth’s reformist convictions can be less definitely asserted, but enough evidence survives that religious sensibilities should not be ruled out as at least part of the Parrs’ reasons for action. Born in 1526 she was a child of the Reformation, and from her earliest days at the court she was an associate of the so-called ‘Protestant sisterhood’ of Katherine Parr, although the degree of her involvement cannot be definitively ascertained.625 Elisabeth’s two inscriptions in her family Book of Hours attest to her willingness to engage with religious texts, and one is the evangelical phrase ‘the feare of god kepeithe men from evell’ transliterated into Greek script.626 William Elderton’s memorial ballad presents her in a suitably pious light, musing ‘But chefe of all mee thinkes I see / Her vertues dentie daie by daie, / Homblie kneeling on her knee / As her desire was still to praie.’627 Elderton was at court during Edward’s reign so his impression of Elisabeth’s piety could have been formed then.628 Walter Haddon too praised Elisabeth’s ‘pietas’.629 None of these pieces of evidence individually speak to a particularly strong faith, but taken together they support a reading that opposing Mary on religious grounds was not out of character for Elisabeth, particularly when allied with William Parr. The timings of Elisabeth’s birth and sojourn at court, along with her key allies and associates and her activity also suggest that Elisabeth was a Protestant for specific, personal reasons. That is, her faith was due as much to circumstances and necessity - such as the ability for Parr to be able to obtain a divorce that would allow them to remarry - as to a genuine and ingrained devotion to reformed church doctrine.

The most significant reason that Elisabeth supported Jane Grey as Queen over Mary was likely that Mary would not countenance William Parr’s second marriage, seeing it as doctrinally invalid, and Elisabeth would lose everything she had amassed since her arrival at court c. 1542, as indeed she did. If Elisabeth had opposed Mary Tudor’s accession to the throne solely on the grounds of faith it seems likely that she would have favoured the claim of her kinswoman and friend, Elizabeth, over Jane. In the events of summer 1553, though, Jane seemed the better option. Elisabeth spent the five years of Mary’s reign rebuilding the status and authority that she had gained throughout her court career prior to Mary’s accession.630 The evidence pertaining to Elisabeth across the years

---

625 James, Catherine Parr, 131-226; Pender, 63-91.
626 The Hever Hours, f. 37v.
627 Elderton, A Proper new balad, STC 7562.
628 Rollins, 199-205.
629 STC 12597, sig. Kiii, Poematum Gualteri Haddoni, l. 3.
630 Her wealth and status, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3, were lost - as evidenced by the inventories documenting the confiscation of the majority of the Parrs’ property in Essex, London and Kendal.
1553-1558 reveals the ambiguity with which she and her situation were regarded and the extent to which she continued to be perceived as a person of political significance and remained politically engaged (including with Princess Elizabeth herself) despite her removal from the court sphere and the reversal of fortune she suffered as a result of her part in the Jane Grey coup. Although as a direct consequence of her own and her associates’ (male and female) engagement with Jane Grey’s usurpation, Elisabeth’s circumstances during Mary’s reign meant that in the years 1553-1558 she was again positioned away from the court; out of the limelight and ‘under the radar’ of the Marian regime. Elisabeth’s allies and associates - particularly the women - from the reign of Edward VI maintained contact for their new positions and continued to work together for their own political goals away from the overtly politicised space of the court.

What follows is an examination of the network of women with whom Elisabeth Parr associated across the years 1553-1558 in order to highlight how and why these connections remained important to Elisabeth’s socio-political conduct. Elisabeth’s political Protestant network during Mary’s reign included Princess Elizabeth Tudor, Jane Dudley, Catherine Grey - second-in-line to Mary’s throne - and Elizabeth Cavendish, the future countess of Shrewsbury. These were all women with whom she had formed strong relationships during her time at the courts of Henry VIII and Edward VI. During Mary’s reign all of these women were in politically sensitive positions, which makes the maintenance of their relationships all the more significant and worthy of note.

Jane Dudley died in 1555, and as mentioned above she left a bequest to Elisabeth in her will. Some 20% of wills that survive from c. 1550-1750 were written by women, and according to Lloyd Davis, wills can be regarded ‘as one of the main genres in which women wrote, or dictated, during the early modern period’.631 The clause of Jane’s will that relates to Elisabeth Parr precedes that relating to Jane’s daughters Mary and Catherine, which might indicate both the regard in which she held Elisabeth, and the status she would have held as marchioness of Northampton. Jane’s bequest included a gown of black velvet decorated with lynx fur with a black velvet kirtle and matching sleeves which Lady Dudley claimed to have ‘had of her self’, suggesting that the gown had earlier been a gift from Elisabeth to Jane.632 Aside from being a useful gift as Elisabeth was potentially short of

632 TNA PROB 11/37/0 f.2A, c. 1554/5.
gowns at this time, having had three taken from her for the use of Queen Mary, the style and quality of this gown makes the bequest significant. A gown of black velvet would have been an expensive item as true black dye was expensive and relatively rare, and in this case the lynx fur made it especially so. As suggested in chapter 3, as a marquess William Parr was entitled to wear this sumptuous fabric and so such a gown would be suitable for Elisabeth as a marchioness. It would also have made an extravagant gift from Elisabeth to Jane Dudley, when the latter's husband was Lord President of the Edwardian protectorate council and an ally of the Parrs of Northampton. The return of the gown to Elisabeth marks not only the continuation of the women’s friendship, but is perhaps also a comment on Elisabeth’s maintenance of her noble status, despite her official loss of her husband and title. In addition to the gown, Jane bequeathed Elisabeth what seems to have been the furniture from her own bedchamber, consisting of her new bed with panels of black velvet and black satin, and a chair, and two cushions, one long and one square, all upholstered to match, all of which would have been very welcome as the majority of Elisabeth’s personal items and furnishing had been confiscated by Mary’s agents.

Jane Dudley’s bequests to Elisabeth clearly confirm the continuation of her feelings towards her friend, as well as her continuing regard for Elisabeth’s status. The same document presents Jane’s strategies for securing favour for her remaining family members, still in the Tower of London following the Jane Grey coup and Wyatt Rebellion. Bequests to members of the Marian court best placed to help her surviving sons underline Jane Dudley’s enduring commitment to her family beyond her death. Jane’s will includes bequests to a variety of people from whom Lady Dudley had sought favour concerning her family, including Spanish nobles such as the Duchess of Alba, who received her green parrot, and Don Diego de Alcevedo who received a generous bequest that included another new bed with accompanying furniture and hangings, the plea:

Beseeching hym even as he hath in my lyf tyme shewed hym self lyke a father and brother to my sones, so I shall requyre hym no lesse to doo nowe their mother is gone. 634

Because she died at what was - for her family and others - a very politically sensitive time, Jane Dudley’s will was an important document - designed to distribute her possessions in the most fruitful and productive way to benefit those she left behind. At the top of her


634 TNA PROB 11/37/0 f.2a, c. 1554/5.
priority list were her family, but friends and former colleagues such as Elisabeth warranted her attention too.

Jane Dudley’s bequest honours past friendship and perhaps looks to a future when Elisabeth could wear a court dress once more. Other friendships and alliances were very much still active, and this included Elisabeth Parr’s alliance with Sir William and Lady Elizabeth Cavendish, and through them, Lady Catherine Grey. Catherine Grey, Elisabeth Parr and William Parr stood as godparents - to Elisabeth’s namesake (and half-sister-in-law), baby Elizabeth Cavendish in 1555. When Elisabeth had stood godmother to baby William Cavendish in 1551 she had been at the height of her political authority and would have been seen as a useful future connection for the young man. In 1555 the bond between the baby girl, her parents and godparents was more about their current kinship and politicised friendship, in opposition to the Marian regime. The Cavendish alliance is an affirmation, then, of Elisabeth’s continuing importance. Perhaps it also signifies a move forward, the development of a network of political proto-Protestants operating beyond the scope of Mary’s government. Elisabeth’s mention in Jane Dudley’s will and selection as godmother to Elizabeth Cavendish confirm that the surviving members of the plots to put Jane Grey on the throne and prevent Mary’s marriage to Philip through the Wyatt rebellion were not divided and still actively engaged in the important social rituals and events of early modern aristocratic life during the reign of Mary.

Elisabeth’s involvement with the Cavendishes signals not only that she continued to be recognised as a person of importance, but that she was maintaining links with her family and kinship network even after the turbulence of their involvement with Jane Grey and the Wyatt Rebellion. The scale of the importance of Elisabeth’s family and kin on and in her activity is one of the strongest threads to emerge from a reconstruction of Elisabeth’s life across the years 1553-1558. They were her refuge when she was separated from her husband, and had the potential to cause her downfall because of the depth of their involvement in the Wyatt rebellion. Fundamentally, though, they were her allies: it was to her family she returned - literally and metaphorically - and their concerns became hers. Additionally the relative statuses of the members of the Cobham family had levelled. In the Edwardian period there was a huge gap in status between Elisabeth and her siblings caused by her elevation from baron’s daughter to marchioness and sister-in-law to the

---

635 For more on the Cavendishes’ political alliances and strategic choices of godparents see Durant, 23-28. See a visualization in Appendix C.
636 As raised in chapter 2.
dowager Queen. As marquis and marchioness of Northampton, Elisabeth and William significantly outranked Lord and Lady Cobham. Elisabeth’s younger brothers served their courtly apprenticeship in the Parrs’ London household, ensuring their physical proximity, but preserving the distinction in rank.\textsuperscript{637} Across the Marian period, when Elisabeth lacked the security of being marchioness of Northampton, she returned to her family and functioned to an extent as Elisabeth Cobham, fully immersed in the Brooke-Cobham kinship connections, which included families such as the Cavendishes and a significant number of participants in the Wyatt rebellion. The Cobham family’s involvement in Wyatt’s rebellion has been touched on by historians.\textsuperscript{638} When a wider network of participants is taken into account the kinship situation emerges as deeper and far more complex, and reveals that the Kentish aristocracy who dominated both sides of the rebellion were intermarried and connected. Even before the rebellion began those with whom Elisabeth associated were viewed with suspicion.

Perhaps more significant and correspondingly less recognised is the extent to which Elisabeth and her family were related to the key figures sent against Wyatt and the rebels as well as those rebelling.\textsuperscript{639} The former were led by Henry Neville, Baron Abergavenny, whose sister Dorothy was married to William Brooke, eldest son and heir to Lord Cobham, and therefore Neville was brother-in-law to William, Thomas and George Cobham who were amongst the rebels, and so too to Elisabeth and William Parr. William and Dorothy Brooke’s marriage was notoriously unhappy - the couple actually separated acrimoniously in 1553 so Neville may have been personally opposed to the Cobham family.\textsuperscript{640} Robert Southwell, the High Sheriff of Kent, also charged with suppressing the rebellion, was married to Henry Neville’s niece, Margaret - also the niece of Dorothy and William Brooke. Elisabeth’s grandfather, George’s father Thomas Brooke, Lord Cobham had married as his second wife one Dorothy Southwell who was probably a relative of Sir Robert.\textsuperscript{641} As well as being the grandfather of Elisabeth and her siblings, Thomas Brooke, Lord Cobham was also the grandfather of Thomas Wyatt, whose mother Elizabeth Wyatt Warner, née Brooke was Lord Cobham’s sister and Elisabeth’s aunt (and namesake). Finally, Sir Henry Jerningham was related to Cobham’s son-in-law John Jerningham who

\textsuperscript{637} TNA E101/520/9.
\textsuperscript{638} Loades, Intrigue and Treason, 155-9, Mckeen, 61-7 and more extensively in the less scholarly but still interesting volume on the rebellion by Eric Simons, The Queen and the Rebel (London: F. Muller, 1964).
\textsuperscript{639} For a visualisation of the Parr/Cobham/Neville/Southwell kinship connections as played out in the Wyatt Rebellion see Appendix C fig. h.
\textsuperscript{640} Mckeen, 47-53.
\textsuperscript{641} Mckeen, 47; Burke, Peerage.
was married to Elisabeth’s younger sister, Catherine. Taking the kinship complexities still further to establish the true extent of the Kentish nobility’s intermarrying and conflicted alliances, Elisabeth’s aunt, Mary Brooke, had married (as his fourth wife, previously his mistress) George Neville, Lord Abergavenny, Dorothy and Henry Neville’s father, making William Brooke’s paternal aunt his step-mother-in-law, and Dorothy’s step-mother, her aunt-by-marriage. William (and Elisabeth’s) great-grandfather, John Brooke, Lord Cobham had married Margaret Neville, daughter of Edward, 3rd Baron Abergavenny (Henry and Dorothy’s great-grandfather), another of whose daughters, Catherine, had married John’s nephew, the son of another Elizabeth Brooke. A further, unexplored element of the Wyatt rebellion that can be connected to the Cobhams is that one of the reasons the rebellion failed is that other parts of the country meant to rise up along with Wyatt failed to do so. One of these was the West Country, Cornwall and Devon, led by Edward Courtenay the young earl of Devon. It was by means of Courtenay that the authorities prematurely found out about the rebellion. Henry Cobham was then serving in Courtenay’s household. Like his brothers William and George, Henry would later prove himself an adept intelligencer, so it seems possible that the Cobham brothers might have been engaged as intermediaries and informers by the leaders of the rebellion.

Thomas Cobham - the most rebellious of Elisabeth’s brothers - links the Cobham family and the Wyatt rebellion to another family with whom Elisabeth was also connected - the Cavendish family. Thomas Cobham had married, c. 1551, Catherine Cavendish, daughter of Sir William Cavendish, one of Wyatt’s rebels who was incarcerated in the Tower along with Parr and the Cobhams. As previously stated, Elisabeth was godmother to Elizabeth and William Cavendish (born respectively 1551 and 1555) highlighting that the families continued to associate beyond their activity in the rebellion. The kinship connections and nuances of the Parr/Cobham/Cavendish families are missing from Durant and Lovell’s presentations of godparent/political relationships but they merit examination. As well as being godparent to Elizabeth and William Cavendish, Elisabeth was connected to the Cavendishes through her brother. Through his marriage to

642 See Appendix C, fig. h.
643 Loades, Intrigue and Treason, 155-6.
644 Venn, I, 361; HC to Thomas Wilson, December 1580, A Collection of Letters, ed. L. Howard, (1753) 352-54.
646 Durant, 25-7, 34.
647 Lovell, 92; de Lisle, 172 and Durant, 23-8.
Catherine Cavendish, Thomas Cobham was (half)brother-in-law to Elizabeth Cavendish (Elisabeth and William Parr’s goddaughter). Additionally, although much later, through Elizabeth Cavendish’s marriage to Charles Stuart, the Cavendishes and Cobhams became kin to Mary, Queen of Scots through her marriage to Charles’ brother Henry Lord Darnley, who was also Elisabeth’s nephew, Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham’s godfather. The Brooke/Cobham and Cavendish families maintained their alliances beyond Elisabeth Parr’s death, particularly Lady Elizabeth Cavendish (later Elizabeth St Loe, later still countess of Shrewsbury and guardian of Mary, Queen of Scots) and Frances, Lady Cobham, mother of Henry. Both women served in Queen Elizabeth’s privy chamber alongside Elisabeth’s brother, George Brooke, and all play a role in the politics of the early Elizabethan reign as discussed in chapter 5.

To conclude this discussion of kinship - a note on Thomas Cobham and the Cobham family’s naming practices. One of the Cobham family’s finest quirks is their policy of reusing names for their children. This practice was quite common amongst the Tudor aristocracy and nobility because of the compliment given to a godparent by naming a child after them and the patronage bond created, as well as the practice of naming children after saints’ days and deceased siblings. This stemmed from the desire to make sure whichever heir inherited the title bore the family name. In the case of the Cobhams, the situation was complicated by the unusual hardiness of their children. Of the ten sons born to George and Anne Brooke, Lord and Lady Cobham, eight survived to adulthood. The ten born included two Henrys, two Edwards and two Thomases. Both Edwards died, as did one Henry, and one other, an Edmund, leaving two Thomases to confuse both their contemporaries and centuries of historians. (This combined with Elisabeth’s continually fluctuating status and most of the family’s longevity could well be to blame for at least part of the scholarly neglect suffered by the family.) Both Thomases were still alive in 1558 when Lord and Lady Cobham died but only Thomas the younger was recognised in Anne’s will. Both were involved in the Ridolfi plot in 1571 that nearly cost their brother William, by then Lord Cobham, his place at court and one Thomas - probably the elder - was accused of piracy, and caused major embarrassment to his siblings in 1563/4. Confusion

648 For a visualisation of the Parr/Cobham/Cavendish kinship connections see Appendix C fig. f.
649 McKeen, 153-4; CP 102/34, Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham to King James VI/I, November 1603.
650 As verification of the Cobham sons’ given names, all fourteen children born to Anne and George Brooke are represented as individual named statues on the tomb that William Brooke, Lord Cobham erected in 1561, see fig. 7, 88; they also appear in Glover’s genealogy and in the Cobham Chronicle, BL Add. MS 37666.
651 CP 198/110, The Will of Lady Anne Cobham, 7 October 1558.
652 For more on this see chapter 5.
reigns, however, over which Thomas is which c. 1553/4. Thomas the elder was born in 1533 and Thomas the younger in 1539. As suggested in chapter 2, Thomas the elder was recognised as an unsavoury character from his teens, but despite this, the dates suggest that the Thomas married to Catherine Cavendish who was sometimes resident with the Parrs in 1553 is Thomas the elder. It is not discernible whether it was Thomas the elder or younger who participated in the rebellion along with his cousin Wyatt and brothers William and George. William and George were both principled men, so it made sense for the similarly charactered (as he later emerges) Thomas the younger also to participate. However, Thomas the younger’s youth, and the extra rebelliousness displayed by Thomas suggests perhaps it was the elder.653 It is actually possible that both were involved.

The significance of the Cobham kinship in political terms came to a head in 1557 when Elisabeth and her brother, George, worked in alliance with the French embassy in opposition to Mary and Philip’s pro-Habsburg agenda c. 1557. This episode highlights that Elisabeth’s most consequential continued alliance during Mary’s reign was with the Queen’s half-sister, the heir to the throne, Elizabeth Tudor, who was also Elisabeth’s second cousin.654 The intimacy of the women’s relationship led to Elisabeth’s most overt political engagement of the period - her use as an intermediary by the French embassy to warn Elizabeth of a plot to marry her to the duke of Savoy.655 In the scheme of the reign this interlude is minor, but in the context of Elisabeth’s political activity it is significant.

De Noailles’ use of Elisabeth as a means of contacting Elizabeth Tudor highlights that in the spring of 1557 Elisabeth was known to be interested in and familiar with the politics and the functioning of the court despite having limited socio-political attachment to it. Her friendship and kinship with Princess Elizabeth - that had by this point continued for at least 14 years - was also clearly contemporaneously recognised. This incident highlights the continuation of Elisabeth’s affinity with the French embassy first recorded in June 1550 at the Edwardian court, but is the first surviving example of Elisabeth’s quasi-diplomatic agency in relation to Elizabeth Tudor, which would become a key aspect of the women’s relationship once Elizabeth was Queen.656 Elisabeth’s role as quasi-diplomatic agent for the French has been noted by David Starkey and David Loades, who both use the event to

653 Simons, 213-4.
654 See Appendix C, fig. i.
656 CSP Span. 1550-1552, JS to CV, 17 June 1550, p. 110; Elisabeth’s quasi-diplomatic agency (raised in chapters 2 and 3) is fully explored in chapter 5.
illustrate the close relationship between Elisabeth and Elizabeth Tudor, albeit in isolation. Starkey described Elisabeth as ‘well placed to warn Elizabeth of the perils of marriage’ because of her turbulent relationship with Parr and makes the leading comment that Elisabeth ‘became one of Elizabeth’s closest and most confidential servants’ but fails to mention her again. Loades commented that Princess Elizabeth ‘was warned of [a] threat by François de Noailles, using another female go between, Elizabeth Parr, the rejected marchioness of Northampton.’ Highlighting the friendship between the women he confirmed that ‘Elizabeth Parr seems to have gravitated towards Elizabeth as a kindred spirit rather than an employer.’ Elisabeth’s proven affinity with Elizabeth Tudor and her willingness and ability to engage with her and as her representative in sensitive political affairs defined their relationship at the Elizabethan court. The evidence of the existence of this relationship prior to Elizabeth’s accession reveals that the politicisation of female friendships that dominates scholarship about the Elizabethan privy chamber was not exclusive to that space, nor to Elizabeth’s reign. Despite surviving evidence presenting this incident as isolated, the lack of extant evidence does not suggest that there was a lack of activity on Elisabeth’s part. Rather, the lack of material evidence of activity attests to its nature, i.e. that it was informal or illicit, such as her involvement with the French embassy and Princess Elizabeth - deliberately trying to interfere with Queen Mary’s official policies. By its very nature this kind of activity leaves minimal textual traces so the lack of evidence by no means signifies that Elisabeth was not making every effort to participate in political matters.

One of the reasons that information about this incident does survive, however, and the most likely reason why Elisabeth was involved is that George Cobham, Elisabeth’s second eldest brother and one of those most closely associated with the Wyatt Rebellion, had, since 1556 acted as Latin under-secretary to the privy council. Whether he was solicited by the French or it was his own initiative is unclear - Harbison’s only comment is that de Noailles ‘acquired a new informer’ in George Cobham. Cobham’s outlook on disrupting the Marian regime had clearly not changed since Wyatt’s 1554 rebellion, as he wholeheartedly abused the access to privileged information that his position gave him by passing intelligence to the French ambassadors. According to Harbison,

Between April 1 and May 1 [1557], the most dramatic Council meetings of the reign took place at Westminster and Greenwich. Thanks to the fact that

658 Loades, *Elizabeth I*, 120;
659 Harbison, 317.
George [Cobham], the French ambassador’s informer, was present at all the meetings, we know more about the discussions than we do about any parallel series between the death of Edward VI and the accession of Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{660}

Cobham’s involvement with the French ambassador makes it unlikely it was a coincidence that François de Noailles made contact with Elisabeth when the French needed a message sent to Princess Elizabeth in the summer of 1557, although it is impossible to discern which Cobham sibling was first known to the ambassador. Whether or not George Cobham did initiate Elisabeth’s contact with de Noailles, Elisabeth had long since been recognised by the French as a person of significance who could utilize a position of importance. The timing of Elisabeth’s involvement with the French should also be noted.

Mary and Philip’s attempt to marry Princess Elizabeth off to the Duke of Savoy signalled political unrest. Philip II of Spain had returned to England in the spring of 1557 to persuade Mary to join English forces to his in support of his war with France and England dutifully declared war on France in June 1557.\textsuperscript{661} By the time Philip left England in July 1557 Queen Mary believed herself pregnant again, therefore the marriage of Elizabeth, the heir to the throne, was a crucial matter for the security of England. The marriage plans came to nothing, and the French wars resulted in major loss of English life and the loss of Calais as an English stronghold in France in January 1558. Mary Tudor never recovered from the illness that began as a phantom pregnancy, and was probably uterine cancer. She died on 17 November 1558 and her throne was inherited by her half sister, Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{662}

**Summary points**

The failure of the coup d’état that briefly placed Queen Jane on the throne of England meant that Elisabeth Parr began Mary’s reign in circumstances that were the polar opposite of the position she had achieved by the end of the Edwardian period. Elisabeth’s fall from grace, as dictated by William Parr’s attainder for treason, revealed the peculiarity of her status, in terms of her marriage and financial stability, and the precariousness of the legal strictures that governed Elisabeth’s personal situation. Whether because of or despite this she maintained and cultivated her connections with former friends and allies like the Cavendishes and what remained of the Dudley family. This suggests something like a network of political Protestants spreading across England but away from the court that comprised those who for political and religious reasons were not part of the Marian regime, but did not have the religious conviction or other necessity to go into exile on the

\textsuperscript{660} Harbison, 322.
\textsuperscript{661} Guy, Tudor England, 247-9; Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 286-98 and Loades, Intrigue and Treason, 238-44.
\textsuperscript{662} Whitelock, Mary Tudor, 299-306.
Continent. This network existed in the space between the conforming and practising Catholics of Mary’s court and government, and the Protestant or Marian martyrs who faced down Mary’s regime with a conviction based on religion, rather than surviving and conforming for political expediency or pragmatism borne out by their circumstances. This political Protestant network was comprised of what could be termed internal refugees (Paul Cavill’s term) or domestic exiles, given that they were removed from the positions of power, whether at Court or in the wider realm, that they had formerly enjoyed and were forced to rebuild their statuses and influence from regional bases. These were the people who supported Jane Grey and probably Wyatt, but not to the extent that they faced execution for treason. These were the middle ranking men and the women of the aristocracy and nobility whose personal allegiances and convictions had not changed but who found themselves temporarily without the power base to support their agenda. In this space as part of this network Elisabeth Parr found a degree of autonomy and freedom that allowed her to exist below the radar of court attention, but to continue to act to promote her own and her allies’ interests.

While William Parr was seen as a threat to the Marian regime - as characterised by his preventative arrest prior to the Wyatt rebellion - Elisabeth and the other women were seemingly not recognised as having significant political importance, or even intent, so fell below the regime’s notice, and they were able to act with an unusual degree of freedom. It is surprising that as a woman herself, who had fought for the right to exert her authority, Queen Mary paid so little attention to women other than her sister Elizabeth, seemingly not considering them a threat to the serenity of her realm. No women were considered to have played a recognisable role in either coup against the Queen’s authority - possibly for the combined reason that Mary was determined to show clemency wherever there was a case to be made against an execution (for treason, not heresy); and because she of all women knew that women, whatever their status, were to an extent subject to what Barbara Harris termed ‘the deeply rooted patriarchal structures that defined their legal rights and material situation’. Harris’ work explores the contrast between these structures and women’s actual lives, and in the case of the paradigm that is Elisabeth Parr in the years 1553-1558, Elisabeth utilised the space for manoeuvering that resulted from her unprecedented situation upon the dissolution of her marriage to Parr to actually utilise a kind of autonomy not usually possessed by women. She achieved this by avoiding or sitting

663 Used in conversation following a paper on ‘Heresy and forfeiture in Marian England’ presented at the Tudor and Stuart History Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research on 4 February 2013.
664 Harris, Aristocratic Women, 6.
outside the ‘accepted’ patriarchal structures that placed women within the authority of their natal or marital families. Elisabeth’s curious situation highlights that she seems to have retained the respect due to her husband’s highest status, whilst escaping the condemnation that came with Parr’s attainder. Concurrently she returned to her natal family. Due in part to her complex status she was a capable and sought after political ally of the Cobham family, rather than a dependent daughter. Her oddly retained but reduced status caused her to be viewed by those such as the French embassy and the Cavendishes as a person of note to be counted, with the interest and interests to ensure she would act with political expediency and subterfuge on behalf of the heir to the throne and her longstanding friend, Elizabeth Tudor.

The marked increase in Elisabeth’s political engagement as Mary’s reign progressed suggests that she correctly read the increased prominence of Elizabeth Tudor and her cause as Mary’s health and policies failed. Elisabeth was able to exert more authority and begin to re-establish this personal authority in the wider realm, and even at the court by successfully petitioning the Queen to return her improperly confiscated assets, which were integral to the noble dignity she hoped to reclaim. Upon Mary’s death, Elisabeth’s transformation had come full circle. She had fallen so low upon her husband’s attainder that she lost all of her possessions, her husband, her title, her material assets and her homes. From that point she carved for herself an individual identity with as much personal authority as a non-royal woman could possess in the 1550s. At the death of Mary and accession of Elizabeth, Elisabeth Parr was poised, hoping to resume her place in the upper echelons of the Tudor court with her friend and cousin as Queen, with the added advantages of personal financial assets and stability, a spouse who could expect to be returned to prominence and a supportive family network including three brothers - William, Henry (replacing Thomas) and George - who were rewarded for their loyalty to Elizabeth with prime positions from the onset of Elizabeth’s reign. Finally and fundamentally, Elisabeth’s activity across the Marian period had proven her willingness and ability to act in politically sensitive situations as well as her loyalty to Elizabeth Tudor - all of which ensured that as soon as Elizabeth succeeded to her half-sister’s throne, Elisabeth Parr was beside her, as a confidante, advisor, and one of the key politically active female courtiers operating during early years of the reign of Elizabeth I.
Chapter 5: Confidantes and counsellresses, 1558-1565

Elizabeth Tudor, fifth and final monarch of the Tudor dynasty that ruled England between 1485 and 1603, succeeded to her half-sister Mary’s throne on 17 November 1558. Upon Elizabeth’s accession Elisabeth Parr returned to her court career, and her former rank of marchioness of Northampton. Yet rather than simply resuming the socio-political significance she had held in Edward’s reign, Elisabeth’s importance now increased. Whereas women at the Edwardian court were prevented from physical proximity to the monarch - barred from access by the all-male domain of the privy chamber and the iron encirclement of the protectorate - at the court of an unmarried Queen regnant, the privy chamber became an almost entirely female domain, in which Elisabeth Parr was a key participant. This chapter presents Elisabeth’s political significance as it was recognised by her contemporaries and highlights Elisabeth’s career as an early Elizabethan female courtier.

The scholarly context

Of the five Tudor monarchs, Elizabeth has arguably received the most scholarly - and public - attention, rivalled only by her father, Henry VIII. Scholarship on the 45 years of Elizabeth’s reign can be broken down into four categories: biographical studies of the Queen herself, studies of key figures of Elizabeth’s reign, the Queen as a ruler and the key policies of her reign and other thematic ventures. Of most interest to this thesis is the emergent body of scholarship addressing the political role of Elizabeth’s women, or female courtiers, both before and after her accession to the throne. These studies sit within the context of the wider scholarly field and traditions of scholarship and presentations of Elizabeth that date back to the reign of her successor, James VI/I and the surge of interest in the Tudors, particularly the Tudor Queens, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More than 100 biographical studies of Elizabeth have been published since 1890, therefore what follows is a brief review of key works and trends. J. E Neale’s 1934 ‘modern romantic nationalistic’ (according to Christopher Haigh) Queen Elizabeth was the definitive study of the Queen until the onset of revisionist historiography in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Neale’s Elizabeth was presented in The Elizabethan Political Scene (1948), The Elizabethan House of Commons (1949), Elizabeth I and her Parliaments (1957) and

665 Starkey, Elizabeth, 236-42.
Essays in Elizabethan History (1958). She emerged as a woman of extraordinary character, sensitively portrayed. Paul Johnson summarised the accident of Elizabeth’s gender as: ‘the birth of a girl to Henry’s new Queen must have filled him with consternation and dismay. What had he done wrong now?’ Johnson and Elizabeth Jenkins drew heavily on Neale, A. F. Pollard and the early work of Geoffrey Elton. Their Elizabeths appear as more politically astute and balanced governors of church and realm. Across the late 1990s and early 2000s, Christopher Haigh, David Starkey and David Loades produced the most significant biographical studies. Haigh discusses how Elizabeth had to ‘establish herself as a worthy and independent ruler, despite her tainted origins and her gender.’ Starkey’s Elizabeth characterises the young princess’s youthful passions and very quick wits in the face of prejudice and her sister’s opposition as she prepared herself for Queenship.

Scholarly works on the reign, and those in more general terms focusing on Elizabeth’s Queenship, increasingly compared with her half-sister, Mary’s, have appeared steadily over the last century. A. L. Rowse’s mid-century The England of Elizabeth sits alongside A. F. Pollard and Geoffrey Elton’s writings as the groundwork of the Elizabethan political scene. In recent years, two edited collections have promoted excellent new and diverse essays by scholars covering all aspects of Elizabeth’s reign. Anna Whitelock and Alice Hunt’s edited Tudor Queenship features a selection of essays that explore all aspects of Elizabeth’s Queenship by scholars such as Charlotte Merton, Susan Doran and Maria Hayward. The Myth of Elizabeth - a collection jointly edited by Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman - explores the afterlife and problematic progression of the Queen from prophecy to legacy. Doran’s other works on, for example, the marriage negotiations, courtships and succession crises elucidate key political issues of the reign and contextualise the people within the politics, making her arguably the current authority on

---

671 Haigh, Elizabeth I; Loades, Elizabeth I and Starkey, Elizabeth.
672 Haigh, Elizabeth I, 185. Haigh’s volume contains an excellent bibliographical essay compiled of an exhaustive list of Elizabethan scholarship from the nineteenth century until the late 1980s.
673 According to Starkey, for example, ‘the Seymour affair had presented her to the world as no better than she should be and much worse than her friends hoped. How better to turn away the sling and arrows of outraged opinion than by playing the Puritan Maid, whose plain dress and plainer manner proclaimed her invincible virtue?’ Starkey, Elizabeth, 89.
the Elizabethan socio-political scene. In recent years, Natalie Mears’ *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms* has emerged as the key text for representing Elizabeth Tudor as Queen and governor of England within her socio-political, private and public context. Mears described her approach as combining the ‘study of real politics with political culture, part of what has been termed “New Political History” incorporating the work of political historians and theorists like Patrick Collinson, Quentin Skinner and John Guy to understand ‘Tudor politics as the interplay between people, institutions and ideas.’ Mears’ methodology led her to ‘explore the social, educational and ideological background of political actors in order to understand how they perceived the Elizabethan regime, the issues facing it and their own responses."

A key difference between the scholarship of the reign of Elizabeth compared with the reigns of her brother and sister is that - particularly relevant to the subject of this thesis - there is a long standing and ever increasing field of scholarship addressing the role of women at the Elizabethan court and during the period as a whole. As early as 1922, Violet A. Wilson produced a monograph entitled *Queen Elizabeth’s Maids of Honour and Ladies of the Privy Chamber.* Gamaliel Bradford’s 1936 *Elizabethan Women* acknowledges levels of women’s education and intellectual capacities, for example, finding ‘a much deeper and truer enthusiasm for knowledge and self-cultivation in many Elizabethan women than anything I have yet indicated.’ According to Bradford, the ‘intellectual fever of the Renaissance … infected both sexes, though naturally not in an equal degree’ and many women ‘strove ardently to make themselves masters of the new culture which was becoming a mighty power in the world.’ This intellectual enthusiasm among Elizabethan women ‘amounted almost to an epidemic.’ Women who were affected (or ‘infected’) ‘went to the root of things’ and studied ‘Latin, Greek, Hebrew, philosophy, mathematics, and became, in many cases, truly conversant with them.’ Although his description of women’s learning is not really admiring, Bradford’s comments do at least acknowledge the range and breadth of women who found pleasure and fulfilment in educating themselves and others, citing Katherine Brandon, duchess of Suffolk as one whose house was ‘a college.’ There has been a continued scholarly interest in Elizabethan women’s intellectual

---

678 Ibid.
679 V. A. Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth’s Maids of Honour and Ladies of the Privy Chamber* (London: John Lane, 1922).
681 Ibid. 37.
pursuits, of which recent examples include Gemma Allen’s study of the Cooke sisters, Jane Stevenson’s work on Women Latin Poets and work on Elizabeth’s own writings by scholars including Janel Mueller. Carroll Camden’s 1952 The Elizabethan Woman was a self-proclaimed ‘panorama of English womanhood, 1540 to 1640’ and describes the Elizabethan woman as ‘a special representative of her sex’ as the Reformation ‘brought forth a new kind of woman who could not be ticked off and classified in the same easy way as her medieval sister.’ Camden goes on to describe women as a ‘mystery’, or at least, that they ‘had convinced men that they were, and their rapidly changing status made men wonder about them even more.’ Camden gives an account of the rise of the new Elizabethan woman, with information drawn almost entirely from printed texts and educational manuals, interspersed with dramatic and literary representations of women.

Over the last three decades, scholarship on Elizabethan women has begun to address the specific question of whether the gender of the reigning monarch had an impact on the role and political authority of Elizabeth’s closest attendants - the women of her privy chamber and her other female courtiers. The scholarly debate on the politicisation of the privy chamber appears in works by, among others, Pam Wright; Judith Barbara Greenbaum Goldsmith; Charlotte Merton; Natalie Mears; James Daybell; and Catherine Howey. Wright was the first scholar to address the likely change in political significance of the Privy Chamber upon the accession of Elizabeth. However, rather than arguing for the increased or at least continued significance of the Privy Chamber under Elizabeth, given the Queen’s gender and that of her attendants in contrast to that of her Council, Wright suggests the opposite to be true. David Starkey similarly maintained that the fact that Elizabeth’s primary attendants were necessarily women ‘created a barrier … of sex …


685 Wright, 158-60.
between the privy chamber and influence in public affairs [which the Queen] reinforced by a ferocious discipline."\(^{686}\) According to Starkey, ‘dabbling in patronage was allowed to [the Queen’s] Ladies, but involvement in politics was not.’ Mortimer Levine followed suit, stating that ‘evidence would have it that what was true for queens [consort] surely held true for all women in Tudor England: they held no significant place in Tudor government.’\(^{687}\) More recently, Christopher Haigh dismissed women’s political importance, stating that ‘[s]oon after Elizabeth’s accession, she called together the women of the Chamber and ordered them ‘never to speak to her on business affairs.’ The Queen was to be the only petticoat politician.’\(^{688}\) Wright asserted that unlike the privy chamber of Henry VIII, which was a ‘cockpit of faction’, Elizabeth’s ladies formed a ‘cocoon’ around her, which acted as the primary barrier against faction and rendered the Privy Chamber almost politically neutral.\(^{689}\) Wright does, however, acknowledge that the ladies of Elizabeth’s privy chamber were part of the political landscape as far as courtiers and foreign ambassadors were concerned, and that the primary function of this female cocoon was to mediate between Elizabeth and the outside world, and in so doing the ladies acted as ‘barometers of the Queen’s mood.’\(^{690}\) Because of this mediation, ‘members of the department had contact, often close, with the participants in the great game of politics.’ When Wright published her essay in 1987 she asserted that ‘it remains to be discovered how far - whether through these contacts or otherwise - members of the department found themselves caught up in the game as well.’\(^{691}\)

Building upon the work of Wright et al, scholars have attempted to address the question of how politically active the women of Elizabeth’s privy chamber and wider court actually were. Charlotte Merton argued that the patronage activities of Elizabeth’s women allowed them roles including as power brokers, patrons and even spies, thus nothing changed in terms of the political importance of the Privy Chamber when the throne’s incumbent was a woman.\(^{692}\) This view is corroborated by Catherine Howey and Natalie Mears, with Howey claiming that the women’s near constant attendance on the Queen

---


\(^{688}\) Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 123. Haigh does not provide a primary source for these comments.

\(^{689}\) Wright, 158-160. In this, Wright concurs with John Murphy whose essay on the privy chamber under Edward and Mary features in the same volume. Murphy, ‘The Illusion of Decline’, 119-146 in *The English Court*.

\(^{690}\) Wright, 167.

\(^{691}\) Ibid.


169
guaranteed them opportunities to influence her ‘over issues of political patronage’, and Mears asserting that women of the privy chamber provided the Queen and others with ad hoc counsel as a way of involving themselves in the politics of the realm. Wright acknowledged the use the Queen made of her ladies-in-waiting in diplomatic relations, of the kind highlighted by Mears and Howey, but stresses that ‘their role as intermediaries, however important, was in no sense a part of their official duties.’ Most recently, Anna Whitelock’s Elizabeth’s Bedfellows: An Intimate History of the Queen’s Court is a narrative history of Elizabeth’s reign that extensively and exclusively addresses the role of the women of Elizabeth’s bedchamber, the most intimate group of the Queen’s female attendants. Whitelock offers useful context and points of reference from across the whole of Elizabeth’s reign for the arguments presented in this thesis. The key scholarship on this issue - Wright, Merton, Mears and Whitelock - thus far has concentrated on the cases of Katherine Ashley and Mary Sidney’s involvement in the early Elizabethan Swedish and Habsburg marriage negotiations (as will be explored below) which gives the impression that this involvement was isolated. Elisabeth Parr was also involved in both of these cases as outlined in chapter 2 and published elsewhere as ‘Petticoats and Politics: Elisabeth Parr and Female Agency at the Early Elizabethan Court’. The following account of Elisabeth between 1558 and 1565 articulates her status and socio-political significance during the early years of Elizabeth’s reign and aims to integrate her and her agency into the existing scholarly debate over the political significance of female courtiers at the early Elizabethan court.

Establishing Elisabeth - Status and identity at the early Elizabethan court

Within the first month of her reign Queen Elizabeth reinstated William Parr as marquess of Northampton and a member of her privy council and Elisabeth’s status correspondingly increased. This section presents Elisabeth as marchioness of Northampton during the reign of Elizabeth I, examines why Elisabeth was able to situate herself at Elizabeth’s court as one of her premier female courtiers despite not having an official role in the court structure, and highlights how she was viewed by her

693 Howey, ‘Busy Bodies’; Mears, Queenship, 54-5 and ‘The Politicisation of the Elizabethan Privy Chamber’, 78.
694 Wright, 152.
697 SP 12/2 (stamped 80), Minute for a warrant for WPmOn, January 1559; SP 12/7 [E. 31] (stamped 46), QE to William Paulet, marquess of Winchester, 1 November 1559.
contemporaries and how she operated as marchioness of Northampton when free of socio-political uncertainty that had dogged her and her position during the reign of Edward VI.

When Queen Elizabeth confirmed William Parr in his estate as marquess of Northampton she granted him lands with rents worth £500 per annum of which £200 per annum of land was specifically for the use of the marchioness, making Elisabeth a wealthy woman in her own right.\textsuperscript{698} The warrant clearly states that the lands are returned to ‘ye lady Marques by ye name of Elizabeth Cobham daughter to ye L. Cobham’ - highlighting that this is the final recognition of Elisabeth’s rights to the lands first presented to her using her maiden name in 1547, reclaimed by her in 1558 and here confirmed.\textsuperscript{699} A complication, however, was that Henry Clifford, earl of Cumberland had laid claim to Elisabeth’s property in Grasmere - presumably when it had been forfeited under Parr’s attainder in 1553, and in 1560, Clifford’s court rolls reveal that Elisabeth also claimed the land.\textsuperscript{700} In 1564 the privy council intervened in order to resolve the disagreement, highlighting that the complications dealt to Elisabeth’s property and status by Mary’s reign continued to dog her a decade later. That the land issue was resolved in her favour, however, highlights both the legitimacy of Elisabeth’s claim to the land, and the regard in which she was held by the council.\textsuperscript{701} Elisabeth wanted to increase and/or properly manage her property portfolio beyond the lands given to her from Parr’s estate, as shown by her dealings with Edward Hastings, baron Loughborough and her brother, Henry, in 1564.\textsuperscript{702} According to Henry, Elisabeth had accused him of him mismanaging her affairs, particularly with regard to the purchase of a new piece of woodland. Henry was upset by this, although not too upset to pun that it made him ‘woold’ [mad] to write of the ‘wooldly sale’.\textsuperscript{703}

At her death Elisabeth’s landholdings gave her rents totalling £600 per annum - during her life this would have assured her a substantial private income and personal wealth.\textsuperscript{704} Despite her extensive property, it is noteworthy that unlike the years 1547-1553 - when Elisabeth had private residences in Surrey, London, Westmorland and Essex and

\textsuperscript{698} SP 12/7 [f. 31] (stamped 46), QE to William Paulet, marquess of Winchester, 1 November 1559.
\textsuperscript{699} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{700} DLONSL5/2/11/1, Court rolls of Henry Clifford, 5 July 1560.
\textsuperscript{701} APC, 142, 22 April 1564.
\textsuperscript{702} CP 3/38, 296, HC to Thomas Middleton, 11 May 1564.
\textsuperscript{703} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{704} The equivalent of c. £103,000 in 2005; SP 12/37 f. 45? (stamped 143), EPMoN’s land income at death ref. lands in Essex, c. 1565 and SP 12/37 f. ? (stamped 145), EPMoN’s land income at death ref. lands in Essex, York, Westmorland and Lancashire, c. 1565.
made visits to a variety of places - no evidence survives of her moving away from the court or the Queen with the exception of her travel to the Low Countries to receive treatment for breast cancer in the spring of 1564.\textsuperscript{705} This underscores the contrasting situation of female courtiers under Elizabeth compared to that under Edward when the women were removed from physical proximity to the monarch and had limited, if any access. Under Elizabeth the situation was reversed and female courtiers formed the first rank between the person of the Queen and her wider court. Elisabeth was due to travel with the Queen on the progress in 1562, which was to be a first official meeting between Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary of Scotland.\textsuperscript{706} When the court went on summer progress in 1564 Elisabeth’s illness prevented her accompanying the Queen so she remained in furnished apartments in Whitehall Palace.\textsuperscript{707} Elisabeth’s physical association with the court underscores her identity as one of Elizabeth’s premier female courtiers, despite not holding any official post at the court.

Elisabeth’s personal wealth during the years c. 1558-1565 is clearly visible in the documents that date from the time of her death. Accounts of her debts and jewellery as well as her paraphernalia bequests detail her wealth in material goods and something of her tastes, in addition to revealing particulars of her circumstances and networks.\textsuperscript{708} Beyond the jewels and personal items given by Elisabeth to her friends and relations, jewels worth £1054 9s 11d were sold in Antwerp (the proceeds of which went to paying off her substantial debts).\textsuperscript{709} Susan James highlights that ‘jewelry was an integral part of both the possessions and the identity of a Tudor women [as] jewels were at once an invstment and a negotiable asset.’\textsuperscript{710} Among the jewellery sold in Antwerp were a ‘ringe of gold sett with a pointed dyamonde and Dyvers other smale Dyamonds’; two gold brooches, one ‘set with a poynted diamond and a longe dyamonde cutt with facetes and too pearles’ and the other

\textsuperscript{705} SP 70/70 f. 9 (stamped 5), QE to MDuP, 4 April 1564 [also la reine d’Angleterre âla duchesse de Parme (Lettres de recommandation en faveur de la duchesse marquise de Northampton, RP, IV, MCCCXX); SP 12/33 [f. 61] (stamped 128), WBLc to WC, 12 April 1564; SP 12/33 [f. 2] (stamped 140), WBLc to WC, 22 April 1564; SP 70/71 ff. 3-4 (stamped 5-6), Richard Clough to TC, 4 May 1564 and CP 3/38, 296, HC to Thomas Middleton, 11 May 1564.

\textsuperscript{706} BL Lansdowne MS 105, f. 124, Plan of the 1562 summer progress, [Spring 1562].

\textsuperscript{707} Guzman de Silva to Margaret, duchess of Parma, 17 July 1564, RP, IV, MCCC.; 31 July 1564, RP, IV, MCCC.; Land 23 September 1564, RP, IV, MCCCXX.

\textsuperscript{708} In addition to the documents detailing Elisabeth’s landholdings at her death: CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; CP 163/136 - Gifts by the Eliz. Brooke, Lady Norten, [1585?] (a miscatalogued fair copy of the above); SP 12/36 f. ? (stamped 58-60), Funeral accounts of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; SP 12/36 f. ? (stamped 62-3), Accounts of the debts at death of EPMoN, 31 March 1565 and SP 12/36 f. ? (stamped 144-145), The note of Suche Jewells as were sent in to Flanders vnto my brother Pasquelo Spinola and by hym sold as herafter Followythe, May 1565.

\textsuperscript{709} The equivalent of c. £183,000 in 2005.

\textsuperscript{710} James, The Feminine Dynamic, 101.
with ‘v smale Rubies and xij smale dyamonds’, a gold cross set with ‘x dyamondes and iij perles, and agate’ and two gold chains, one with small pearls weighing 3oz, the other with pearls weighing 6oz. There as also a ‘booke of goold with x Rubies’ which may have been a prayer book designed to be worn on a girdle. All of the jewels were sold to a Genoese merchant named Phillippe Cattainio. The identity of the seller, too, is noteworthy as Parr had long been involved with the Spinola brothers.\footnote{Pascale and Benedict Spinola had been associated with the court and the Cobhams since the days of Edward VI. In 1549 Benedict had attended upon the King and provided horses and Italians (for an unknown purpose) and been financially rewarded for his troubles. \textit{APC}, 1549, 272. Spinola also features in Christopher D’Assonlieville’s note of disreputable Italians aiding Francis Bertie and the marchioness of Northampton to deceive the Swedish, c. 1562/3; 23 May 1563, \textit{RP}, III, MCXIX, 630. Benedict Spinola also features on Elisabeth’s list of debts at her death for £108.}

The belongings Elisabeth dispersed in her will allow a partial reconstruction of her socio-political networks c. 1565. Many of the names are familiar from the previous reigns in which Elisabeth participated, highlighting the continuity of these networks and the longstanding nature of her alliances with fellow courtiers. Frances Brooke, Lady Cobham received ‘A sable and head and feet of gold; a piece of brown lawne; The pearl in the cloth; The pearl in the little round box; The rest of the great perles; A ring with a parecite [parakeet?].’ Catherine Jerningham, Elisabeth’s only surviving sister inherited ‘A jewel with a diamond and a ruby’. Elisabeth’s brothers William, George and Henry were also beneficiaries, as were a number of prominent members of the Elizabethan court - male and female. William Cecil, Mildred Cecil and their daughter Anne, future countess of Oxford, all received bequests - Cecil received a gold clock with a pearl. John Ashley received ‘A jewel with an agate on one side and a crystal on the other with 17 images within.’ This was one of a number of carved agate pieces Elisabeth bequeathed including one with faces carved on both sides of the stone so it was presumably meant to be worn as a pendant that could fall on both sides.\footnote{Susan James has demonstrated the popularity of carved portrait jewels, both cameos and intaglios and agate was a popular stone for carving. Elisabeth also had a carved tablet portrait of her husband that she willed back to him upon her death. James, \textit{The Feminine Dynamic}, 102-3.} Other members of the court who were beneficiaries included Lady Dorothy Stafford, one of Queen Elizabeth’s privy chamberers, who had married the Queen’s uncle-by-marriage, William Stafford, after the death of his wife, Mary Boleyn. Others included Lady Anne Talbot, probably the widow of Elisabeth’s uncle, Lord John Bray, Lady Margaret Woodhouse (née Shelton, rumoured mistress of Henry VIII in the early 1530s) Lady Anne Throckmorton and Lady Catherine Knollys and her daughter, Elizabeth, and Lady Catherine Howard, née Carey, another granddaughter of Mary Boleyn, all of whom were distant kin of Elisabeth’s. Also included were Lady Lennox, who was
Margaret Douglas, niece of Henry VIII, whose son, Charles married Elisabeth’s
goddaughter Elizabeth Cavendish and fathered Arbella Stuart. Elisabeth’s long term
friend, Lady Elizabeth Clinton received a great pearl in paper, the bullion for a girdle of
gold, the portrait of herself that she gave to the marchioness, and Elisabeth’s ‘wagon’,
which seems to have been a kind of wheeled chair that she used to move around when too
weak from her cancer to walk. Elisabeth’s husband received his own portrait, which, as it is
included in the list of jewels Susan James speculates may have been a tablet miniature that
Elisabeth wore. Elisabeth’s paraphernalia bequests and the accounts of her jewels sold in
Antwerp reveal that her taste in jewellery was as sophisticated as it had ever been at the
Edwardian court. What they unfortunately do not reveal, however, is any material sense of
continuity as it is unfortunately not possible to match up any of the specific items Elisabeth
owned or commissioned c. 1553 or those given to her by her mother in 1558 with those
she sold or bequeathed in 1565. This may be simply because the descriptions do not match,
or it may be that Elisabeth had reworked pieces or given them away in the interim.

There is some continuity from 1553 however as Elisabeth’s longstanding attendant
and sister-in-law, Jane Newton, features on the bequests list, receiving ‘A cripon, partly of
white lace, ten yards of furred velvet; two gilt bottles and a gilt salt.’ Nazareth Newton,
the future Lady Paget and the youngest Newton sister also featured in Elisabeth’s bequests,
indicating the strength of the connection between the marchioness and the Newton family.
Mistresses Forsweke, Skipworth and Heneage (Anne née Poyntz) - who also appear -
were likely attendants on Elisabeth at court. Her other women were allotted ten pounds
apiece to be disbursed by her brother, William Brooke, Lord Cobham. As a marchioness
Elisabeth was entitled to stabling for 16 horses and five beds when her husband was away
from court, and stabling for eight horses and just two beds for her women when her
husband was with her. If the progress to meet Mary Queen of Scots at Sheffield had

713 Durant, 84-7 and Lovell, 241, 243-50.
714 All quotations taken from CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; CP 163/136,
715 After Elisabeth’s death Jane seems to have followed her sister, Frances, into the Queen’s household. The
Queen’s Purse expenses for 1559-1569 record payment to ‘Mistres Iane late one of the ladie marques women
for her wages at vj li xiiij s iiij d per Annum during pleasure for one yere endid at Tannunciation of our Lady
1566 - vj li xiiij s iiij d.’ In John Gough Nichol’s Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth (edited from
Groom of the Privy Chamber, John Tamworth’s copy text - BL Harley Roll AA. 23 (the ‘Lady Marques’ is
glossed as Helena, but she and William Parr did not marry until 1571. John Gough Nichols, Progresses and
Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, Volume V - Appendices, Bibliographies, and Index, eds. Jayne Elisabeth Archer,
716 Anne née Poyntz may also have been a distant relative of Elisabeth’s and is a possible candidate for the
inscriber in the Hever Manuscript Hours, where on f. 98 appears an inscription sighed ‘A Poyntz’; Graham-
Matheson, ‘In Kent and Christendom … where I read and rhyme’.
717 Sheffield Record Office, Stafford Papers MS 33, f. 45.
taken place in 1562 Elisabeth would have been allowed a provision of stabling for five horses and two beds to enable her to accompany the Queen.\(^{718}\) The respect given to Elisabeth and her status as a marchioness seems confirmed by a list endorsed by William Cecil as ‘Estimations of the order’ - presumably of precedence - at Elizabeth’s court for the first five years of her reign.\(^{719}\) Perhaps drawn up to record the gentlemen of the court attendant on the great ladies Elisabeth appears supported by Thomas Parry, Edward Rogers and Francis Knollys in the first year, and Rogers, Knollys and William Cecil thereafter. As well as her hightorn attendants, Elisabeth’s accounts feature other women and men employed by her or at least in her service. She owed her shoemaker, two embroiderers - one of whom, David Smith, had been working with the Parrs since at least 1553 - an ale brewer, two beer brewers, two taylors, four goldsmiths, a baker and a chandler.\(^{720}\) She also paid 20s for the poor women of the kitchen and a laundry woman. Elisabeth also owed money to gentlemen whose names are familiar to scholars of the Elizabethan court including Richard Clough, Thomas Gresham and her uncle by marriage, Edward Warner, William Crowe who may be the mercer William Crowder who appears in the Parrs’ accounts from 1553, as well as Benedict Spinola. Finally she had debts to pay to her servants for wages and 20s were paid ‘to the powre woman of the keichin.’ All in all her debts amounted to more than £3500.\(^{721}\)

Elisabeth’s personal significance to the Queen and members of the court is plainly demonstrated by surviving documents including the correspondence that circulated throughout Europe during Elisabeth’s suffering from jaundice in 1562 and what was probably breast cancer, c. 1563-5.\(^{722}\) When Elisabeth suffered from jaundice the circulation of news regarding her health illustrates the high regard in which she was held by members of Elizabeth’s court particularly the diplomatic network of Nicholas Throckmorton, resident ambassador in Paris, Thomas Chaloner, resident ambassador in Madrid and William Cecil and his attendants at the court. Henry Cobham, Elisabeth’s younger brother was assisting Chaloner at that time and his response to Elisabeth’s illness indicates the genuine affection between the siblings, discussed further below. William Honnington wrote to Thomas Chaloner in Madrid, and evidence in the letter suggests that there was at least

\(^{718}\) BL Lansdowne MS 105, f. 124.

\(^{719}\) BL Lansdowne MS 104, f. 10, Estimation for the order of precedence, 1558-1564, [1564].

\(^{720}\) Elisabeth’s significant debts to beer and ale brewers are particularly interesting in light of the disagreement she had with her brother, Henry Cobham over the fact that he sent too much beer to her in Antwerp (via Aryan Capell) because the cost of the carriage was more than any profit to be made. CP3/38, 296, HC to Thomas Middleton, 11 May 1564.

\(^{721}\) SP 12/36 f. ? (stamped 62-3), Accounts of the debts at death of EPMoN, 31 March 1565.

\(^{722}\) See Appendix A, nos. 72-80.
one letter to Chaloner or Henry Cobham prior to this that alerted them to Elisabeth’s illness and caused Cobham to leave immediately for England.\textsuperscript{723} Honnington wrote to Chaloner that Parr’s condition could not be ‘unanswered’ to him, suggesting perhaps that Chaloner had written to Honnington for information.\textsuperscript{724} Chaloner’s letter to Elisabeth congratulating her on her recovery confirms further correspondence, describing his and Henry Cobham’s reactions to receiving ‘the reaport hither written’ and the next ‘lettres [which] brought us better tydinges.’\textsuperscript{725} William Cecil, John Somers and Anne Throckmorton wrote from the court to Nicholas Throckmorton, apprising him of Elisabeth’s health scare. Henry Cobham and Thomas Chaloner’s reactions to Elisabeth’s ill health clearly attest to Elisabeth’s value at the English court and the affection in which she was held by her associates, all of whom were significant members of early Elizabethan diplomatic proceedings. Chaloner even used Elisabeth’s near-death experience to persuade Henry to mend a quarrel between them, alluding to the extent and sincerity of their reaction to Elisabeth’s illness. Chaloner was evidently still in contact and favour with Elisabeth when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1564 as Richard Clough wrote to him from Antwerp updating him on her case.\textsuperscript{726} William Cecil’s comment that ‘none shall be more grevoosly lost of a subject of this Court’ attests to Cecil’s personal regard for and longstanding friendship with the marchioness - they had been associated since at least the early 1550s; more particularly, however, Cecil’s comment serves to illustrate the high regard in which the marchioness was held by her friend and cousin, the Queen.\textsuperscript{727}

The intimacy between Elisabeth Parr and Elizabeth Tudor was widely recognised by their contemporaries, although it has not been a significant feature of recent scholarship. Elisabeth is given a single mention in a number of - but not all - biographies of Elizabeth Tudor, such as those by David Starkey, David Loades, Christopher Haigh and Elizabeth Jenkins, but is omitted from recent studies such as Tracy Borman’s \textit{Elizabeth’s Women: the Hidden Story of the Virgin Queen} and Anna Whitelock’s \textit{Elizabeth’s Bedfellows: an Intimate History of the Queen’s Court}, confirming that although some scholars acknowledge her presence near Elizabeth, the significance of the women’s relationship has not previously been acknowledged.\textsuperscript{728} A number of glancing references to Elisabeth, particularly in terms of her

\textsuperscript{723} BL Add. MS 35832 ff. 82-4, TC to EPMoN, 14 October 1562.
\textsuperscript{724} SP 70/42 f.183 (stamped 189), William Honnyng to TC, 12 October 1562.
\textsuperscript{725} BL Add. MS 35832 ff. 82-4, TC to EPMoN, 14 October 1562.
\textsuperscript{726} SP 70/71 ff. 3-4 (stamped 5-6), Richard Clough to TC, 4 May 1564.
\textsuperscript{727} SP 70/40 f. 269 (stamped 239), WC to NT, 29 August 1562.

176
relationship with the Queen, hint at the depths of her importance and her unprecedented circumstances, but never explain or contextualise them. As an example, Christopher Haigh’s sole (unreferenced) mention of Elisabeth is the comment that ‘Elizabeth sometimes paid for funerals, especially those of her own relations - she financed the burials [sic] of the Marchioness of Northampton in 1565’ which recognises Elisabeth’s kinship to the Queen, but does not explain it. Natalie Mears also refers to Elisabeth’s relationship to the Queen, referencing Elisabeth as one of ‘a group of female intimates often holding feed or unfeed privy chamber posts’ at the early Elizabethan court, and in passing hints at her intimacy with Habsburg ambassadors. David Loades questioned Elisabeth’s position at court asking ‘in what sense such grandes dames manquées as the countess of Sussex and the marchioness of Northampton were in [Queen Elizabeth’s] service remains doubtful: it is highly unlikely that they were on any official payroll.’ All of these references acknowledge Elisabeth as a fixture of the early Elizabethan court but fail to recognize the extent of her activity or influence as one of Elizabeth’s most prominent female courtiers.

A key factor of Elisabeth’s enhanced status, or rather the security of her position at the early Elizabethan court stemmed from the support of her kin. In addition to the kinship she claimed to Queen Elizabeth and the prominent role of her husband, Elisabeth’s siblings provided her with a useful network of fellow courtiers at home and overseas. Of Elisabeth’s 10 surviving brothers, George, Henry and William continued to have the most impact on and most significant place in her life. Thomas, who had featured significantly during the Edwardian years, descended into criminality during Elizabeth’s reign, again finding himself in the Tower of London for treasonous activity in the Ridolfi plot of 1571 (in which his brothers William and Thomas the younger were also implicated) and piracy in the late 1550s and 1560s. After the death of Elisabeth’s parents in the autumn of 1558, shortly before Elizabeth’s accession, Elisabeth and her siblings moved up a generation, with William Brooke succeeding to the title of Lord Cobham just before Elisabeth was restored as marchioness of Northampton - significantly outranking him in the court hierarchy as she had done during the reign of Edward. Elisabeth’s position in the court hierarchy relative to her siblings was similar to the situation in terms of the families

729 Haigh, Elizabeth I, 67.
730 Mears, Queenship, 54.
731 Loades, Elizabeth I, 123-4. Elisabeth does not appear on any list featuring ladies who were paid to attend on the Queen.
732 See for example R. G. Marsden, ‘Thomas Cobham and the Capture of the St. Katherine’, The English Historical Review, Vol. 23, No. 90 (Apr., 1908), 290-291. It is noteworthy that Marsden describes Cobham as well connected because of his relationship to William Brooke, Lord Cobham, but says nothing of his sister, the marchioness.
with whom she had been allied during Edward’s reign. Her status was unchanged but her situation within the social context of Elizabeth’s court made her comparatively even more significant. Elisabeth’s sister-in-law (from 1559), Frances was a privy chamber attendant, sometime called mistress of the wardrobe, and Elisabeth’s brother, George Cobham was appointed a gentleman of the privy chamber from 1558.\(^{733}\) George had acted against Queen Mary in favour of Elizabeth during the former’s reign, which undoubtedly endeared him to the latter - whether or not they then knew each other personally.\(^{734}\) Henry and William Cobham travelled to Spain as ambassadors in the earliest days of Elizabeth’s reign - William to apprise King Phillip of the news of his wife’s death, and Henry to escort the new Spanish ambassador, Bishop Aquila de Quadra to England.\(^{735}\) The outgoing ambassador, de Feria, commented that neither brother had ‘enjoyed a good reputation’ - referring most likely to their involvement in the Wyatt Rebellion, the main intention of which was to prevent Mary’s marriage to King Phillip - and credited their success with past loyalty to Elizabeth’s cause and the fact that their sister the marchioness was ‘in high favour with the Queen.’\(^{736}\)

Extensive evidence of the Cobham siblings’ interactions survives in correspondence from 1558 to 1565 that articulates their close kinship bonds and continued involvement in each others’ affairs. Just as William and Henry achieved their embassy to Philip of Spain in 1558 because of Elisabeth, George seems to have been recommended for a diplomatic adventure by his brother, Henry.\(^{737}\) On 1 October 1562, John Vertusius, Provost of Deventer wrote to William Cecil, having heard of his ‘learning and virtue’ from Mr Cobham - probably Henry - telling him that he had a secret necessary for Queen Elizabeth to hear, but as neither he nor Cecil could travel, an intermediary was needed.\(^{738}\) Vertusius suggested George Cobham, whom he knew. The letter was carried by a Mr Cobham, again probably Henry. In the event, Cecil replied making no mention of Cobham and suggesting

\(^{733}\) BL Lansdowne MS 3, f. 193, Names of the Officers of the Queen’s Chamber and Household, with their several quotas towards subsidy, 1558. George Cobham was given a £30 allowance for food. The same document allows £20 each to Frances Newton and Dorothy Broadbelte, and £30 to Elizabeth St Loe. f. 165, Money remaining unpayed of the lords subsidies granted unto the Queenes majestie Anno primo, features payments of £54 6s 9d to ‘the marques of Northampton’ and £120 to ‘the Lord Cobham.’ Both men also appear on a list of Noblemen assessed for the first payment of the Subsidye granted to our Soveraigne Ladye Queene Elizabeth in the first yeare of her kinges Raigne, f. 173, where William Parr owed £266 13s 4d and William Cobham, £600.

\(^{734}\) George’s activity for and against the Marian privy council; Harbison, Rival Ambassadors, 317; as highlighted in chapters 2 and 4.


\(^{736}\) Ibid.

\(^{737}\) Ibid.

\(^{738}\) SP70/42 ff. 42-3 (stamped 43-4), John Vertusius to WC, 1 October 1562; SP70/40 f. 115 (stamped 116), WC to John Vertusius, 22 December 1562.
using a cipher instead of a messenger.\(^\text{739}\) The relationship between Elisabeth and her brother Henry - whom she called ‘Harrie’\(^\text{740}\) - is most visible in the extant documentation as Henry’s long period in Madrid and Elisabeth’s subsequent trip to the Low Countries meant communication happened through correspondence - in contrast to Elisabeth’s relationships with William and Frances Cobham, and her husband, William Parr, all of which seem to have taken place almost entirely in person.\(^\text{741}\) George Cobham, too, was usually to be found near his sister in the Queen’s privy chamber. Elisabeth’s only extant letter from the Elizabethan period is a note of thanks to Thomas Chaloner for kindness to Henry Cobham, to which Chaloner replied.\(^\text{742}\)

When resident ambassadors in Madrid and Paris respectively Chaloner and Nicholas Throckmorton corresponded between them about the Cobham siblings as well as with them. As an example, the commendation to a routine letter from Throckmorton to Chaloner apprising him of the current political situation and events in France reads

> I pray youe make my hartie Commenradaciones to Mr Harrie Cobham, And shewe hym that all his frendes in Engelande be in healthe. And that I truste to satisfice theexpectaciones of hym and my Lady Marques his Suster before newyeres Daye.\(^\text{743}\)

Chaloner responded ‘Mr H. Cobbham kyseth your handes for the good newes yow wrote of the forwardnes of my Lady his Susters newe yeres gifte.’\(^\text{744}\) Unfortunately no detailed record of the gift survives, but the fact that three Elizabethan ambassadors were involved in the procurement of Elisabeth’s New Year gift testifies to the high regard in which she was held by her brother and associates. Henry’s affection for his sister did not prevent him criticizing her, and indeed contributed to his hurt when he felt she had mistreated him. When Henry was acting for Elisabeth in her business affairs while she was in the Low Countries receiving treatment he was hurt that Elisabeth thought he was mismanaging her affairs, going so far to suggest that ‘perhaps she was weke and could not take paynes to rede it, and her reder did make a lye of my letter and ment to doo me no good.’\(^\text{745}\) Henry implored Elisabeth’s steward, ‘let not my lady be sory that I have delte so in <her> busines’ before exclaiming that he had ‘cause to crye ovte to her that she useth me so

---

\(^{739}\) SP70/42 ff. 42-3 (stamped 43-4), John Vertusius to WC, 1 October 1562; SP70/40 f. 115 (stamped 116), WC to John Vertusius, 22 December 1562.

\(^{740}\) CP3/69. In Elisabeth’s bequests, her ‘brother Harrie Cobham’ received a silver saucer and a pair of silver candlesticks, and a pair of silver gilt cushions, among other things.

\(^{741}\) Or at least, no correspondence survives.

\(^{742}\) SP 70/40 f. 92 (stamped 84), EPMoN to TC, 7 August 1562.

\(^{743}\) SP 70/33 ff. 69-70 (stamped 99-100), NT to TC, 20 December 1561.

\(^{744}\) SP 70/34 ff. 62-5 (stamped 54-6), TC to NT, 15 January 1562.

\(^{745}\) CP 3/38, 296, HC to Thomas Middleton, 11 May 1564.
unjustly and if she dye I may saye that she hath doonne no body worse but me, and that [God] end my dayes a fore hers if any sai the wordle hath loved her better then I and hath had a more earnest will to please her.’ Cobham thought that Elisabeth had forgotten that ‘that which I doo, is for love as a brother, and not bounden by duety as a Servant’ and that her ‘inconstancy’ had ‘disproved the common proverb of women’ as he was of the opinion that ‘nothing coulde have made her lesse to have loved me and being in extremitie to write un to me in this sort.’ Henry Cobham’s affection for his sister, as suggested by his reaction to her illnesses in 1562 and 1564, seems confirmed by his inscription in the family’s Book of Hours two days after her sister’s death promising ‘to my kynne all kynnelyness’, poignantly written on the nearest blank space to Elisabeth’s own inscription. The Cobhams’ interest and pride in their kinship is confirmed by the number of surviving celebrations of it, including the two genealogies now in the Cecil Papers, Francis Thynne’s Cobham Chronicle and two further manuscript genealogies commissioned by Elisabeth’s nephews, Henry and George. The Cobham Family portrait commissioned by William to commemorate his success is a testament to his sister and her role in his achievements. It is possible that Elisabeth’s death prompted William’s commission as it had Henry’s inscription. Although Elisabeth’s relationships with her brothers do not immediately translate into influence at court, reconstructing the extent of the Cobham kinship network at the court of Elizabeth I and across Europe - given the frequency with which they were deployed on embassies - highlights the power and potential for influence that the family possessed. Elisabeth herself was perhaps the most important member of the neglected Cobham family network. Potentially the most consequential of Elisabeth’s familial relationships was actually with her sister-in-law, Frances Brooke, Lady Cobham, which was both socially and politically important. In 1561 Ambassador de Quadra described both women as intimates of the Queen and as his informers. Like Elisabeth Frances was clearly regarded as a politically engaged woman with influence with the Queen.

746 The Hever MS Hours, f. 39v.
747 CP 225/1; BL Harley MS 6157 ff. 8-12; BL Harley 2134 f. 130 and BL Add. MS 37666.
748 There are now two copies of the Cobham Family portrait, the original at Longleat House, the property of the Marquess of Bath and a later copy commissioned by Lady Elizabeth Cecil née Brooke to include her youngest brother, not born when the 1567 original was painted. The later copy is now at Bolton Hall in Yorkshire.
749 Work has been done on the earlier Cobhams, as in Nigel Saul, Death, Art, and Memory in Medieval England: The Cobham Family and their Monuments, 1300-1500 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and David Mckeen’s Memory of Honour, a two volume biography of Elisabeth’s brother, William that takes steps to contextualise the family.
and an interest in intelligencing. In 1563 she received a letter from John Fitzherbert, a recusant Catholic living in self-imposed exile in the Low Countries during Elizabeth’s reign who wrote to Frances regarding the international reputation of the Queen and her behaviour. Fitzherbert acknowledged that he had no acquaintance with either Frances or her husband, suggesting that her reputation was such that she was known as a person who could utilise politically sensitive information or intelligence sent from abroad. Frances seems to have maintained a number of Elisabeth’s socio-politically significant contacts after the latter’s death - she corresponded with Elizabeth St Loe, later Elizabeth Talbot, countess of Shrewsbury and potentially through this connection became known to Mary, Queen of Scots who spent years as an honoured captive in the countess’ household. Lady Cobham also corresponded with and was godmother to two children of Dr John Dee, also an associate of her sister-in-law. Like the marchioness Frances was recognised by her contemporaries as someone whose favour and patronage should be sought and used for good effect and following her husband’s disgrace for his part in the Ridolfi plot of 1571, Frances used her influence with William Cecil (whose son, Robert, would go on to marry her daughter, Elizabeth in 1587) to get her husband allowed back at court and reinstated on the privy council. Frances seems to have come into Elisabeth’s household during the reign of Edward VI when Elisabeth was newly married to William Parr and marchioness of Northampton. At that time Elisabeth’s brother, William, was married to Dorothy Neville but after Neville’s death in 1558 William married Frances, having presumably met her when they were both in the Northamptons’ household. To an extent Elisabeth’s relationship with her sister-in-law mirrors her own relationship with her late

750 Frances Brooke, Lady Cobham continued her career at Elizabeth’s court long after the death of her sister-in-law. She served Queen Elizabeth as Mistress of the Robes until her death. Among incidents of her exerting influence and patronage from her position as a female courtier are that she is credited with smoothing her husband’s re-entry into court society following house arrest for his tangential participation in the Ridolfi plot in 1571, and in 1587 she attempted to do the same for William Cecil, then Lord Burghley, after the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. See William Howard Sherman, John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 16 and Mears, Queenship, 55.

751 Bess of Hardwick was godmother to Frances’s son, George and Frances was godmother to Bess’ daughter Frances, later Pierpont. The two women corresponded throughout the 1570s and 1580s including over New Year gifts for the Queen and the perils of childbirth. Durant, 91-2; Whitelock, Bedfellows, 101-2.

752 She was a godmother or gossip to a daughter of Dr John Dee - a known associate of her sister-in-law. It is possible that Lady Cobham met Dee in Antwerp after which time he escorted her sister-in-law home. Glynn Parry, A Protestant Vision: William Harrison and the Reformation of Elizabethan England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 306-7.

753 Mears, Queenship, 54-5.

754 McKeen, 47-53. Anne Brooke, Lady Cobham ignored her eldest granddaughter in her will of 1558 but Elisabeth Parr left bequests to both of her nieces named Frances (as WBLC named his second daughter with Frances Newton after her mother, even though his firstborn child already had that name). CP198/11 and CP 163/136.
sister-in-law, Katherine Parr, in whose household she met her future husband, and whose socio-political legacy had a huge impact on her career at the later Tudor courts.

The court in context - female courtiers and their careers

The evidence of Elisabeth’s career at the early Elizabethan court indicates that like the accession of Edward VI in 1547 and Mary in 1553, the accession of Elizabeth Tudor in 1558 initiated a restructuring of the court itself. David Loades famously described an unmarried Queen regnant as ‘a crisis in herself’. What this ‘crisis’ resulted in was the increased significance of Elisabeth’s female courtiers, particularly the privy chamber, as they created a barrier of female intimacy between the Queen and her privy council. Under a male monarch and the dual-monarchy of Mary and Philip, the privy council had almost complete access to the monarch as the privy council and privy chamber co-existed and overlapped within the monarch’s privy lodgings. The ring of Queen Elizabeth’s female courtiers that separated her from her council created a uniquely politicised space in which the women used their intimacy with the Queen and their access to privileged information as the source of their own political authority. As will be explored below they were seen by the rest of the court and the wider field as having increased political significance and as representatives of the Queen herself because of this access. The Queen recognised and utilised this new courtly dynamic to create a dual-gendered network of agents whom she could use separately and together to influence ambassadors and courtiers trying to gain privy access to her person and her ideas. This section examines the female courtier at the Elizabethan court, highlighting Elisabeth Parr as a key member of this politically significant group.

A crucial point is that Elisabeth Parr identified herself as a courtier and was widely recognised as such. The text Elisabeth commissioned in 1551, Thomas Hoby’s *The Book of the Courtyer*, was finally printed in 1561. The text’s applicability to the court was widely acknowledged and in 1562 when Elizabeth’s female courtiers were promoting her marriage with Erik XIV of Sweden, Elizabeth’s former governess, Katherine Ashley suggested Erik ought to read the book of *The Courtisan*, which was a French version of the very *Book III* of

755 See Starkey, ‘the King’s Privy Chamber’; Murphy, ‘The illusion of decline’ and Loades, *The Tudor Court*, as well as scholarly contexts to chapters 3 and 4.
757 Murphy, 130-146 and Whitelock, ‘A woman in a man’s world’, 323-334.
The Courtyer that Elisabeth had commissioned to be translated. Hoby’s didactic text bears a number of significant points in the paratextual materials that give it its place within mid-Tudor society. The frontispiece bears the assertion that it was an example, ‘very necessary and profitable for gentlemen and gentlewomen abiding at the Court.’ Ashley clearly thought it would be profitable for Erik to read the text in order to learn more about the English court and its Queen. Erik was duly presented with a gilt bound copy of Book III. The second piece of textual evidence locating Elisabeth at the court is the ballad written by William Elderton to commemorate her death, and advertise for a new patron. In the 64 lines of the ballad Elderton uses the word ‘court’ or a variant of the word 12 times. He described Elisabeth’s death with the phrase ‘the fairest flower of my garland was caught from court’. Elderton alludes to Elisabeth’s turbulent relationship with Parr with the line ‘whose courting need not to be tolde’, praised her ‘courtlie countenance’ and worried that never ‘the like in courte will bee.’ The ballad locates Elderton at court as a balladeer and confirms his desire to return with a new patron but stanzas relating to Elisabeth strongly suggest her familiarity with and significance at Elizabeth’s court. Elderton’s addressing of the ballad to the ladies of the Elizabethan court is also suggestive of intimacy with the Elizabethan female courtiers. A whole stanza of Elderton’s ballad is devoted to Elisabeth the suitor. Elderton write of her approaching near Elizabeth’s ‘princeslye state’ with ‘sorrowfull teares’ and ‘tremblinge feares / Leste anie her suites shulbe hit a wrie.’ According to Elderton, Elisabeth’s ‘place’ was as ‘A pitiful speaker to the Queene / Bewailinge every poore mans case’ as she had done ‘many a time’. For this aspect of Elisabeth’s behaviour to be represented in the ballad undoubtedly signifies the degree to which this was a recognised and frequent aspect of Elisabeth’s identity as a female courtier.

Elizabethan contemporaries recognised that female courtiers provided Queen Elizabeth with ad hoc counsel - Mears’s term. In 1592, Robert Beale advised his fellow privy council secretary, Edward Wootton:

Learne before you accesse her majesties disposition by some in the privie chamber with whom you must keep credit for that will stand you in much steede and yet yield not too much to their importunitie for sutes, for so you may be blamed, nevertheless pleasure them when convenientlie you may.

759 SP 70/40 ff. 72-6 (stamped 65-7), Dymock’s statement, 6 August 1562.
760 Courtyer, Sig. Aiii.
761 STC 7562, Elderton, A proper new balad.
762 STC 7562, ii. 39-32.
763 BL Additional MS 48161, f. 107, Instructions for a Principall Secretarie obserued by R: B for Sr Edwarde Wotton, 1592. Printed as Robert Beale, ‘A Treatise of the Office of a Councellor and Principall Secretarie to her Majestie’ (1592) in Read, Mr. Secretary, appendix to Vol. 1, 423-43, 437. Also cited by Mears, Queenship, 55.
Beale’s comments are the source for the idea of female courtiers as ‘barometers of the Queen’s moods’, but suggests that the women would ‘importune’ court officials to petition the Queen on their behalf. This reading does not credit female courtiers with the same degree of significance recorded in contemporary evidence of women’s political engagement at the early Elizabethan court. In 1559 Augustin Gyntzer, secretary to the Habsburg ambassador, Bishop Aquila de Quadra during the marriage suit of Archduke Charles, reported to Emperor Charles V that he had delivered letters to the Queen, but had not presented the Archduke’s portraits directly to her. Instead he had

placed them so that they could not fail to catch the eyes of those noble ladies who are most in the Queen’s good graces, and that, you may be assured, is as if the Queen herself had seen them. More I need not say.

Gyntzer’s report highlights the importance given to female courtiers and their opinions by foreign embassies, as seen in de Silva and de Quadra’s use of Elisabeth Parr’s opinion on the Queen’s health and her relationship with Robert Dudley. Gyntzer’s inclusion of the phrase ‘more I need not say’ displays the common understanding of this idea amongst the court and diplomatic community. In claiming that if the ladies closest to the Queen saw the portrait it was as if the Queen had seen it herself, Gyntzer implies that Elizabeth’s female courtiers (a select or privileged few) were an extension of the Queen and representative of her, an undeniably political role, akin to domestic ambassadors. The idea that Elizabeth’s female courtiers were seen as and used by the Queen as part of a deliberate strategy of self-presentation sits alongside Susan Frye’s arguments regarding Elizabeth’s identity as an unmarried Queen, in opposition to the tropes of wifehood used by her predecessor. As Frye asserts, Elizabeth’s ‘self-creation as an authoritative, unmarried woman competed with her own society’s conviction that women should be chaste, silent and obedient.’ By surrounding herself with female intimates acting as both chaperone and boundary, however, Elizabeth’s female courtiers supported her maidenly identity. Simultaneously though they followed her into the public and political arena as a unified female company. Similarly Howey asserts, ‘by acting as Queenly surrogates who extended the Queen’s authority to places she could not physically be, Privy Chamber women acquired higher status and more privileges than they otherwise would have held by birth or marriage.’

---

764 Wright, 167.
767 Ibid. 20.
This increased status is an example of women’s intimate relationships with the Queen as confidantes or gossips achieving significant political authority as part of her court.

That female courtiers handled and transferred sensitive information or intelligence with potential political importance is demonstrated by instances such as Thomas Chaloner, Elizabeth’s ambassador to Madrid, describing Elisabeth Parr and the women of the privy chamber as ‘conseilleresses’. Chaloner’s letter expressed his dislike of women spreading rumours, conjecturing that some women of the court had been indiscreet - perhaps about his character - and that this had contributed or directly led to the failure of the marriage suit he was pursuing with one of Elizabeth’s ladies. Chaloner’s letter conflates this informal talk and rumour spreading - which now might be termed gossip - with political discourse with his use of the word ‘conseilleresses’ to describe these women, and locating the activity in the ‘counseil chamber’. Because of these particular word choices, Chaloner raises a salient issue - the extent to which female courtiers were involved in the transfer of information, both personal and political, around the court, and whether the sharing of information by women traditionally thought of as informal had a more serious function, recognised and acknowledged by early modern polities. Chaloner wrote to Elisabeth that the revealing of his secret occurred because ‘in counseil from one to an other of the Counseilleresses at last some oone or other telleth tales owte of the Counseil chambre.

Although critical with regard to women spreading incorrect information, Chaloner’s comment highlights contemporary awareness of the extent to which it was acknowledged that women of the privy chamber did transmit information from as well as into the Chamber. Chaloner’s use of the word ‘conseilleresses’ appears to be the first recorded usage of this term in the English language. That it was used in correspondence with Elisabeth Parr is highly significant because in addition to her role as petitioner (as discussed below), it is clear that Elisabeth was also involved in counsel with the Queen, her privy councillors and other female courtiers. Although used figuratively and critically, the fact of Chaloner’s use of this key word relates the female occupation of gossiping or informally chatting to the political discourse of counsel. Chaloner’s comments may be read as an acknowledgement that, as suggested by Mears, female courtiers were known to counsel the Queen and other political figures of the court.

---

768 SP70/38 f. 269 (stamped 219), TC to EPMoN, 26 June 1562.
769 Ibid.
770 A search of the State Papers in TNA, the OED, EEBO and other resources has produced no other record of the term or any variant spellings.
771 Mears discusses ad hoc counsel in Queenship, 4-56, with women’s roles as ad hoc counsellors specifically addressed 54-5; similarly Mears, ‘Politics in the Elizabethan Privy Chamber’, 72-8.
The idea that the female attendants of a powerful noble or royal woman could have influence, even politically significant influence over their mistress is not new, or exclusive to the privy chamber/court of a Queen regnant. Illustrating the important and politicised relationships between a noble or royal lady and her household are the letters of Catherine Grey’s grandmother, Mary Tudor when Queen of France. Corresponding with her brother, Henry VIII, regarding the disbanding of her English household by the French court, Mary wrote of her ‘mother Guldeford’ - the mother of the maids of her chamber - who had been sent back to England against her wishes. Mary was left with those ‘such as never had experience nor knowledge how to advertise or give me counsel in any time of need.’

Mary wrote to Henry’s chief minister, Cardinal Wolsey that she ‘had as lief lose the winning I shall have in France as to lose her [Mother Guildford’s] counsel when I shall lack it.’ Mary’s comment that she had been left without attendants who could give her adequate counsel articulates the extent that the role of counsellor was an accepted and expected duty of a female courtier. Mary’s attendants were her links with her home court and her fellow quasi-ambassadorial representatives of England and English interests in her role as Queen of France. Without her ladies and other members of her household, Mary was politically isolated. Mary’s female courtiers were meant to form a ‘cocoon’ around her, as a permeable barrier between the young and politically isolated Queen and the wider context.

772 No. 3356, 1413, Mary, Queen of France to Henry VIII, 12 October 1514, LP, I, 1513-14; a transcription of the severely damaged BL Cotton MS Caligula D VI, f. 257.

773 No. 3355, 1413, Mary, Queen of France to Henry VIII, 12 October 1514, LP, I, 1513-14; a transcription of the severely damaged BL Cotton MS Caligula D VI, f. 146.
of the French court. Elizabeth Tudor was in her home court when she became Queen, but she was as vulnerable and isolated as her aunt in terms of allies as the monarch was always subject to the agendas of their court and council/counsellors and embassies such as the Habsburgs attempted to capitalize on this vulnerability by influencing Elizabeth’s female courtiers to influence the Queen in turn.\footnote{De Silva explicitly states this as his strategy: RP, IV, MCCC, GdS to MDuP, 17 July 1564.}

Counsel itself is not a gendered term and the extent to which early modern women provided counsel to those around them has been the subject of recent scholarly debate. Highlighting specifically the role of counsel at the Elizabeth court Natalie Mears suggests that the ‘informal and dynamic nature’ of counsel - the term used to discuss both solicited and unsolicited advice - allows us to see the ‘interaction between individuals’ operating at court.\footnote{Mears, \textit{ Queenship}, 50.} Above all the process of dispensing and receiving counsel reveals trust between the persons involved, irrespective of gender or position. Mears cites agents, ambassadors and other officials who were members of Elizabeth’s court but not appointed to the privy council as among those from whom the Queen would take advice. Gemma Allen devotes a chapter of her study of the Cooke sisters to their roles as ‘female counsellors’.\footnote{Allen, \textit{The Cooke Sisters}, 96-123, 96.} Allen roots the sisters’ success in counselling their family members and other acquaintances in their education and rhetorical skill. The Cooke sisters’ humanist education provided them with the rhetorical tools to ‘conceal, emphasise and legitimate’ their counsel.\footnote{Ibid. 97-8, 117. Allen suggests that Anne Bacon in particular worried about how her advice was received by her sons.} During the reign of Edward VI Katherine Brandon, duchess of Suffolk expressed a desire to counsel Lord Protector Somerset. Writing to William Cecil in the spring of 1549 of ‘the great good that I colde have done for my lord ways / to have offered him my cunsell’, and that if she ‘colde be any ways / perswayded that I myght do my lord any good / I wold glaydly put my selfe in any werke for it.’\footnote{SP 10/10 f. 3 (stamped 4), KBDuS to WC, 25 March 1549.} Katherine’s use of the word counsel to define her actions and intention is significant, as is her understanding that her unsolicited advice might be badly received and gossip could have a negative impact on proceedings. She had previously written to Cecil asking him for better news of the court and claimed that his response had quieted her greatest fears ‘for I ded nede fyer so muche that wyked toungs shoulde do hym [Somerset] harem in sowyng so dyepe suspectes in the coinseles harttes agenste my lord.’\footnote{Ibid.} Katherine seems not to have considered her gender any bar to the dispensing of

\footnote{774 De Silva explicitly states this as his strategy: RP, IV, MCCC, GdS to MDuP, 17 July 1564.} \footnote{775 Mears, \textit{ Queenship}, 50.} \footnote{776 Allen, \textit{The Cooke Sisters}, 96-123, 96.} \footnote{777 Ibid. 97-8, 117. Allen suggests that Anne Bacon in particular worried about how her advice was received by her sons.} \footnote{778 SP 10/10 f. 3 (stamped 4), KBDuS to WC, 25 March 1549.} \footnote{779 Ibid.}
counsel to those in power, rather perhaps like the Cooke sisters her learning and linguistic skill allowed her to see herself as capable and worthy of offering advice to any person. Gender is the key difference between Katherine’s desire to counsel the Lord Protector and the female courtiers providing counsel to Queen Elizabeth, however, although not to do with suitability to give counsel, rather the intimacy and physical position to do so and to achieve an effect.

Further illustrating the extent to which the influence female courtiers or attendants could wield was recognised and exploited, in 1559 the Habsburgs attempted to lure Lady Catherine Grey - heir to Elizabeth’s throne, as her sister, Jane, had been Edward’s - out of England and use her as a rival claimant to Elizabeth’s throne in opposition to France’s candidate, Mary Stuart. It was believed that if Lady Catherine were approached by ‘a trusty body servant’ - necessarily female - she could be enticed away. A range of women was suggested, including the mistress of the maids, the Countess of Feria and Lady Hungerford. ‘Lady Montague was named, also the wife of the Lord John Grey [Catherine’s aunt] but it was thought that the one loved her husband too well to keep the secret.’

Elizabeth’s circumstances as monarch rather than just a noble or royal lady combined to allow the position of her attendant or female courtier to be a uniquely politicised role for women, and manifest to its greatest extent because Elizabeth was an unmarried Queen regnant rather than a Queen consort like her aunt. Elizabeth’s situation heightened the responsibility of her female courtiers by increasingly politicising their counsel, but did not fundamentally alter the role of a female courtier or attendant as one of influence.

A major element for consideration in terms of the political role of women at Elizabeth’s court is the networks of personnel who were present at the court itself. A key element of the strength and functioning of Elizabeth’s female courtiers collectively was the extent to which they had had relationships with Elizabeth prior to her accession. Just as Mary had done when she triumphed over Jane Grey, when she became Queen Elizabeth rewarded those who had remained loyal to her and served her as a princess during previous reigns. Katherine Ashley, for example, had been with the princess since her birth as governess and later confidante. Elizabeth Clinton, too, had been part of the princess’s

780 de Lisle, 181-4, 236-7, 259-60; Whitelock, Bedfellows, 54-6, 234.
781 SP 70/8 ff. 2-5 (stamped 4-7), An anonymous man in the service of the CdF to WC, October 1559.
782 Starkey, Elizabeth, 25-7, 69-78.
household from the 1540s. Elizabeth Clinton had in fact been requested to counsel
Elizabeth (then Princess) when in 1549 Robert Tyrwhit was tasked with persuading
Elizabeth to implicate Thomas Seymour in plotting against the Protectorate. Tyrwhit asked
for the return of Elizabeth Clinton (then Lady Browne) as

the Experience that I hav of her, ther ys no Body may do mor good to caus
[Elizabeth] to confesse the Trouth then she; nor in good Fayth, I thynke, ther
ys no Body hath better Wyll, that she shuld do so, thene she hayth; nor can
weysler Conselle her to yt thene she cane.784

Tyrwhit’s comments here that Elizabeth Browne was best placed and most willing to
counsel the princess of the right course of action in this matter clearly indicates the role
that women played as informal female counsellors during the reign of Edward VI.
Elisabeth Parr should be recognised as a part of the group of long-term, loyal associates
who had influence on and intimacy with the Queen as she had known them since
Katherine Parr’s sojourn as Henry VIII’s final consort, 1543-7. That these relationships
continued across the intervening decade is suggested by Elisabeth’s role as intermediary
between Princess Elizabeth and the French embassy in 1557, for example. This long-
standing association was built upon a network of kin and allies, who came to dominate
ey early Elizabethan court politics as they had those of the Edwardian court, c. 1547-1553. It
was Elisabeth’s place in the network of women that caused ambassadors from across
Europe to court her for intelligence and opinions.785

Elisabeth Parr’s immediate political significance at the early Elizabethan court was
also a direct result of her situation at the Edwardian court. The associations and associates
or friends she made amongst the nobility during her time as marchioness of Northampton,
c. 1550-1553 were all reformist/proto-Protestant - the Dudleys and the Seymours, for
example. When Elisabeth and William Parr made their return to prominence so did these
families, with one significant difference. With the exception of the Parrs, the families who

---

783 Starkey, Elizabeth, 229; Susan Brigden, ’Clinton, Elizabeth Fiennes de, countess of Lincoln (1528-1589), ODNB.
784 CP 150/68, Robert Tyrwhit to Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset, 25 January 1549.
785 Queen Elizabeth’s privy chamber attendants at the beginning of her reign included a significant number of
women who had documented relationships with Elisabeth Parr, both before and after the Queen’s accession.
Catherine Grey, Mary Sidney, Anne Throckmorton, Mildred Cecil, Bridget Skipwith, Dorothy Stafford,
Elisabeth St Loe (formerly Cavendish), Frances Newton (who was from 1559 Frances Brooke, Lady Cobham
after her marriage to Elisabeth’s brother, William, as his second wife) and Nazareth Newton - sister of
Frances and Elisabeth’s longstanding attendant Jane - all either feature in Elisabeth’s 1553 accounts,
household inventories and/or paraphernalia bequests at her death in 1565, or evidence survives of their
associations at court events. Anne Throckmorton, Bridget Skipwith and Mildred Cecil only feature on one
list of Queen Elizabeth’s attendants but feature on Elisabeth’s list of beneficiaries made shortly before her
death, showing that they maintained significant relationships beyond the origins of the Elizabethan privy
chamber.
returned from exile to be represented at Elizabeth’s court were all the younger generation. Elisabeth and William as marquess and marchioness of Northampton were the only noble couple to return to positions of prominence at the court as they had held them at Edward’s. Where Elisabeth’s influence at the court of Edward VI had been mirrored by (or shared with) Anne Seymour, duchess of Somerset and Jane Dudley, countess of Warwick, later duchess of Northumberland, and to an extent by Katherine Brandon (as she was then), none of these ladies were now in a position to exert any significant influence over the new Queen. Jane Dudley lost her title following her husband’s execution for treason in 1553 and had died in 1554. The Dudley family did have a significant presence at court in the younger generation, most notably through Sir Robert Dudley, who achieved celebrity for his infamous relationship with the Queen, and Lady Mary Sidney, one of Elizabeth’s female courtiers for 30 years and mother of the notable poets Philip Sidney and Mary, countess of Pembroke through her marriage to the Parrs’ nephew, Henry Herbert (married to Catherine Grey in the Whitsun Weddings of 1553). After Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset’s execution in 1552 Anne had retired from Edward’s court. She was given a place at Mary’s court but did not return to serve Queen Elizabeth, preferring to remain in the country, where she married a member of her household. Frances Brandon, duchess of Suffolk married her master of the horse, Adrian Stokes, resulting in the same removal from court as Anne Seymour. Incidentally, Adrian Stokes became the second husband of Anne Throckmorton following Frances and Nicholas’ deaths. Katherine Brandon also married again in or around 1553, to Richard Bertie, one of her gentleman ushers and did not return to court, preferring to concentrate her efforts on leading a religious life and acting as a religious patroness. Anne Herbert, countess of Pembroke (née Parr) died in 1552. The deaths and dramatically altered circumstances of these great ladies created space into which Elisabeth Parr, as one of the last remaining noblewomen who had been associated with and attached to the Queen since the reign of her father, could sit almost unchallenged for her favour.

786 There is extensive scholarship on Robert Dudley’s role and position at Elizabeth’s court, all of which make reference to his family. See, for example, Derek A. Wilson, Sweet Robin: A Biography of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1533-1588 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981); Household Accounts and Disbursement Books of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester ed. Simon Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Simon Adams, Leicester and the Court: Essays in Elizabethan Politics (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

787 Retha M. Warnicke, ‘Seymour, Anne, duchess of Somerset (c.1510-1587)’, ODNB. Anne petitioned extensively for the release of her son, the earl of Hertford from the Tower of London following his illicit marriage to Lady Catherine Grey.

788 Retha M. Warnicke, ‘Grey, Frances, duchess of Suffolk (1517-1559)’, ODNB.

789 Franklin-Harkrider, Women, Reform and Community.

790 Narasingha P. Sil, ‘Herbert, William, first earl of Pembroke (1506/7-1570)’, ODNB.
As well as longstanding attendants and traditionally loyal families like the Dudleys, Queen Elizabeth's household was populated with kin and cousins - a benefit she enjoyed as an English born monarch. She was able to surround herself with kin as well as loyal adherents in a manner that her half-sister Mary could not. Scholarship such as Kristin Bundesen's doctoral thesis has examined in detail the extent to which Elizabeth surrounded herself with her Howard/Carey kin, but no scholarship has yet factored in the Cobham family. The Cobhams were close enough kin to the Queen that when Robert Cecil, future Secretary of State to Elizabeth and James I, married Elisabeth Parr’s niece and namesake, Elizabeth Brooke, William Cecil took the opportunity to draw up his family’s genealogy because he could now claim kinship to the Queen through the Cobham family’s connection to the Boleyns. Elisabeth Parr and therefore Henry Cobham, George Cobham and William Brooke, Lord Cobham - the three of Elisabeth’s brothers who had most significance at the Elizabethan court - were second cousins of the Queen as they shared mutual great-grandparents. That the Queen herself recognised Elisabeth as kin is suggested by two documents. In Queen Elizabeth’s 1564 letter to Margaret of Parma the rhetoric easily disguises the literal kinship if the women’s genealogies are not taken into account: Elizabeth addresses the duchess as her ‘dear cousin’ as she does the marchioness. The word cousin had a dual significance in the letter. With reference to Margaret, Elizabeth deployed the discourse of kinship between monarchs and highlighted that she held the marchioness in similar regard. More importantly, however, the phrase could be taken literally as indicative of her kinship with Elisabeth Parr, itself a reason why she would merit Margaret’s favour and hospitality. The other document that verifies the Queen and marchioness’s kinship connection - the warrant that restores the Parrs’
marquessate and property upon Elizabeth’s accession - survives in two copies.\footnote{795} The crucial feature for this discussion is that Queen Elizabeth refers to William Parr as her cousin, as she later does Elisabeth. Prior to her accession, Elizabeth - like her brother Edward before her - referred to William Parr as her uncle, because of her father’s marriage to his sister, Katherine Parr, during Elizabeth’s formative years. Although minor, the change in the terms of reference Elizabeth uses to describe William Parr signifies that his kinship to the Queen was no longer defined by his sister, but his wife.

Anecdotal pieces of information or evidence can also be used to support the value of their relationship - William Cecil recorded two mysterious debts that the Queen owed Elisabeth in 1561 and 1562. As they were small amounts of money - £3 and 2 angels\footnote{796} - and an unusual occurrence, possibly these were gambling debts or some other wagers highlighting the women’s friendship and social enjoyment of each other’s company.\footnote{797} As mentioned above, when she died Elisabeth left the Queen three bands of pearls and a jewel, which seems to have been a heart with marigolds, and a black gemstone.\footnote{798} Queen Elizabeth paid for her funeral and saw that she was buried in a place of honour on the north side of the quire, near John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, at St Paul’s in 1565.\footnote{799} Elisabeth’s documented and contemporarily recognised intimacy and familiarity with the Queen and numerous of her leading courtiers is, along with her affinity for and interest in court and high politics, the reason that Elisabeth was such a successful courtier and (as below) a quasi-diplomatic agent in Elizabeth’s marriage negotiations.

The Habsburg ambassadors resident at Elizabeth’s court from 1558 were well aware of the women’s closeness and used it to gain privileged information about the Queen. De Quadra recorded that Elisabeth was in a better position to judge the Queen’s health than anyone else, and de Silva repeatedly commented on the women’s intimacy in his dispatches to Margaret of Parma when he sought to use Elisabeth as an information broker in the Queen’s marriage negotiations.\footnote{800} Writing to the duchess on the events of July 1564 De Silva twice reported that the marchioness was ‘tan faborida de la Reyna’ -

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{795} SP 12/7 [f. 31] (stamped 46), QE to William Paulet, marquess of Winchester, 1 November 1559.
  \item \footnote{796} During the reign of Edward VI an angel was worth approximately 7s.
  \item \footnote{797} BL Lansdowne MS 5 f. 120 and BL Lansdowne MS 104 f. 7.
  \item \footnote{798} CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; CP 163/136, Gifts by the Eliz. Brooke, Lady Norten, [1585?] (a miscatalogued fair copy of the above).
  \item \footnote{799} STC 7562, Elderton, ll. 9-10: ‘For under the roufe of sweet Saint Paull, / There lyeth my Ladye buried in Claye’.
  \item \footnote{800} CSP Span. 1558-1567, p. 214, BdQ to PoS, 13 September 1561. See discussion and notes to the discussion on pp. 75-7 and fn. 774 for de Silva’s references, discussed below.
\end{itemize}
such a favourite of the Queen - as Margaret was well aware. De Silva’s letters make clear that he became close to Elisabeth because of her intimacy with the Queen. It was politically expedient for him also to be in her confidence as this would allow him greater access to and influence on the Queen through the marchioness. Elisabeth encouraged de Silva, presenting gifts to the ambassador, which he then passed on to the Queen as a means of gaining access and favour. That de Silva, like de Quadra before him, valued Elisabeth’s personal opinion and information is highlighted by his comments that her relationship with Robert Dudley affected how de Silva viewed Dudley’s relationship with Queen Elizabeth. The duchess of Parma was well aware of the personal significance of Elisabeth to Queen Elizabeth, because the Queen had written informing her of Elisabeth’s importance to her when Elisabeth travelled to the Low Countries for breast cancer treatment in the spring of 1564. In her letter Elizabeth used language of love and loyalty to describe Elisabeth, a woman ‘long been known to us as a very virtuous lady, blessed with our love’ and held in the highest rank among her ladies at court. The letter stressed Elisabeth’s physical weakness but determination to travel in the face of the Queen’s use of ‘all persuasion open to us to steer her away from her opinion and wish, even sending for people from there [Antwerp] for medical men who could heal her’. Apparently Elisabeth had beaten down the Queen by her continual insistence on what she perceived as the best course of action. Allowing for formulaic rhetoric, the letter seems to attest to the strength of Elisabeth’s character, particularly given what is known about the Queen’s formidability. This letter is the only solid evidence of the intimacy between the Queen and the marchioness from the Queen’s perspective. Elisabeth’s authority was ultimately the product of her personality, intellect and longstanding friendship with the Queen married with her noble rank, but her position at the centre of an active kinship network certainly enhanced her social standing and political effectiveness. Elisabeth was kin to all of the Queen’s Howard/Carey relations through their mutual Boleyn ancestors, but her most significant kin during Elizabeth’s reign were her siblings and evidence presents genuine affection between the Cobhams, as well as useful political alliances.

Elisabeth’s domestic political significance at the early Elizabethan court manifested in two key ways. One of these was her ability to act as a patroness for her socio-political network because of her rank or status as a marchioness; the other was the extent to which

801 RP, IV, MCC, GdS to MDuP, 17 July 1564; RP, IV, MCCCVI, GdS to MDuP, 31 July 1564.
802 Ibid.
803 RP, IV, MCCLXX, GdS to MDuP, 23 September 1564 [also CSP Foreign, 1564-1565, 287].
804 SP 70/70 f. 9 (stamped 5), QE to MDuP, 4 April 1564; printed in RP, IV, MCCLXX, 4-5.
805 Ibid.
she was a newsworthy figure and her behaviour and reputation provided opportunities for information sharing and intelligencing. The following discussion presents Elisabeth’s dual role as gossip and figure of gossip. As suggested above, correspondence relating to Elisabeth’s illness is indicative of her contemporary significance and illustrative of her network of contacts and influence in the 1560s. Elisabeth also used her illness, as did others around her, as a means of engineering interactions and accessing information across Europe in 1562 and 1564. The politicised aspect of Elisabeth’s illnesses can be seen in the spread of information about her condition across Europe in 1562, and the manner in which and persons by whom it was discussed as highlighted above. Anne Throckmorton’s use of the phrase ‘none other news’ confirms that Elisabeth’s health was considered worthy of inclusion in Anne’s letters that furnished her husband with news and gossip or intelligence from the English and Scottish courts; another letter informed Nicholas that an intruder was found in Mary, Queen of Scots’ private bedchamber, whom Mary had wanted to kill with her bare hands.806 Throckmorton personally cared about Elisabeth’s well-being, but as an ambassador, it was also part of Throckmorton’s role to be aware of the current circumstances of his home court. Elisabeth’s illness and the Queen’s proclamation of their friendships and plea to Margaret of Parma for her hospitality created a context of Anglo-Habsburg diplomacy in which the marchioness was hosted and befriended by the duchess and possibly also her cousin, Holy Roman Emperor Maximillian II.807 Concurrently, William Cobham - who had accompanied Elisabeth to Antwerp - took the opportunity to send news and intelligence back to William Cecil and the English court regarding the continuing unrest in the Netherlands, caused by opposition to the introduction of Philip II’s Spanish Inquisition and general feelings of discontent against Habsburg Imperial/Spanish rule. Cobham’s letter to Cecil from 12 April 1564 included news of merchants’ complaints being dismissed by the Lords in Brussels, and Cobham’s fears that ‘they Inglysshe name begynes to be odios unto theym’ when previously it was ‘wont to be in most honor’.808 Elisabeth’s visitation of Habsburg imperial courts in the spring of 1564 initiated her relationship with Ambassador de Silva that was crucial to the politics of the

806 SP 70/31 f. 108 (stamped 107), AT to NT, 24 February 1563.
807 Although a meeting between Elisabeth and the Emperor cannot be definitively asserted, two pieces of evidence suggest that a meeting might have taken place - firstly that Elisabeth was escorted home by Dr John Dee who had been in the Netherlands presenting his book, dedicated to the Emperor Maximillian, in person, and secondly that once Elisabeth had returned to England, Queen Elisabeth via Roger Ascham and Margaret of Parma wrote to Maximillian asking for the ‘loan’ of his private physician, perhaps suggesting that Elisabeth had been treated by him during her sojourn in the Low Countries.
808 SP 12/33 [f. ?] (stamped 140), WBLC to WC, 22 April 1564.
English court later that year when tensions in the Low Countries were running high. As well as introducing Elisabeth to a number of important people at the Habsburg courts, Elisabeth’s visit brought her into contact with Dr John Dee who became her escort home to England. In order to thank him for his care of her during their return from Antwerp to England in the summer of 1564, Elisabeth petitioned the Queen for a favour for Dr Dee. In his autobiographical manuscript account of his life and work Dee records how ‘I brought the Lady Marquess of Northampton from Andwerp by sea to Greenewich’ and how she made an ‘humble sute’ on his behalf. In return the Queen promised Dee the deanery of Gloucester. Although in the event the Queen changed her mind and Dee never achieved the deanery, this is a clear example of Elisabeth using her influence with the Queen to engineer favour for a member of the court, and is rare in that - unlike her other suits for kin and longstanding acquaintances - there is no other clear evidence of a connection between the marchioness and Dee, suggesting that Elisabeth’s efforts on Dee’s behalf stemmed purely from gratitude for services rendered over and on the seas.

As well as maintaining contact with foreign ambassadors resident at the English court and enacting diplomacy abroad, Elisabeth’s network of suitors included a number of Elizabeth ambassadors resident at other European courts. Because they were geographically distant and corresponded by letter, evidence is extant that documents Elisabeth’s patronage activities on behalf of Thomas Chaloner and Nicholas and Anne Throckmorton. Elisabeth almost certainly acted as a patroness for fellow courtiers but living in close proximity limits the amount of textual evidence surviving. Thomas Chaloner, resident ambassador in Madrid c. 1559-1564, Nicholas Throckmorton, resident ambassador in Paris and Scotland, and his wife, Anne, all corresponded with and about the marchioness, and their correspondence is revealing of the ways in which Elisabeth used her privileged position as confidante of the Queen to attempt to secure favours for her friends and allies, not always with success. Anne Throckmorton’s letters to her husband on embassy in France detail the efforts she went to to secure his recall and improve her circumstances at the English court, aided by Elisabeth Parr (and others as part of a network of male and female patrons and suitors to the Queen). Nicholas Throckmorton was sent as resident ambassador to Paris in 1559. From as early as spring 1560 the

810 Autobiographical Tracts of Dr. John Dee, Warden of the College of Manchester, ed. James Crossley (London: The Cheetham Society, 1851), 10, 12, 22.
811 SP 70/39 [f. 2] (stamped 21-22), AT to NT, 10 July 1562; SP 70/41 f.184 (stamped 178), AT to NT, 20 September 1562 and SP70/51 f. 108 (stamped 107), AT to NT, 24 Feb. 1563.
Throckmortons began a lengthy campaign for him to be allowed back to England, and Anne was an active petitioner to the Queen, using other courtiers including the earl of Bedford and Nicholas’s cousin, William Parr and his wife, Elisabeth, to help her cause.\footnote{SP 70/19 f. 94 (stamped 46), Henry Killigrew to NT, 15 October 1560; SP 70/39 [f. ?] (stamped 21-22), AT to NT, 10 July 1562; SP 70/41 f.184 (stamped 178), AT to NT, 20 September 1562 and SP70/51 f. 108 (stamped 107), AT to NT, 24 Feb. 1563.}

In spring 1561 Anne went to Paris to join her husband and briefly entered the service of Mary Stuart in her final months in France as Queen Dowager, Mary’s husband François II having died in December 1560. Anne had returned to the English Court by April 1562, and resumed her tireless suit for Nicholas’s return. Nicholas finally returned to England in 1564, but was soon sent to Scotland to negotiate with Mary Stuart.\footnote{Mears, *Queenship*, 42-6, 50; Stephen Alford, *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession Crisis, 1558-1569* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 86-93, 125-6, 159-61.}

Across the period spring 1562 to spring 1563 Anne Throckmorton was resident at the English court while Nicholas still remained in France. The letters that Anne wrote to her husband reveal her struggles to live at the court without her husband and the lengths of her efforts to secure his recall. In the summer of 1562 Queen Elizabeth planned to meet with Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland in an historic reunion that in the event did not take place.\footnote{BL Lansdowne MS 105, f. 124 is a plan of the progress, showing AT and EPMoN as required to attend the Queen.}

Anne Throckmorton’s comments regarding the arrangements she was making for the progress include references both to her situation and her use of Elisabeth Parr as an intermediary with the Queen, claiming ‘I have done what I can bothe by my self and my Ladye Marques to steye my goyng.'\footnote{SP 70/39 [f. ?] (stamped 21-2), AT to NT, 10 July 1562.}

Elisabeth had been involved in the Throckmorton’s suit for revocation since 1561 when Henry Killigrew, future brother-in-law to William Cecil through his marriage to the third Cooke sister, Katherine, had reported to Nicholas Throckmorton that Anne had petitioned the Queen regarding Nicholas’s recall and received an answer by Elisabeth, suggesting that Anne’s use of the marchioness as an intermediary was a repeated occurrence.\footnote{SP 70/19 f. 94 (stamped 46), Henry Killigrew to NT, 15 October 1560.} In the case of the progress, Anne was using Elisabeth’s influence in a less political way, to address a more practical situation that was also a result of her circumstances as an ambassador’s wife. The genuine affection between the two women can be assumed from Anne’s comments at the time of Elisabeth’s illness later in the summer of 1562 regarding her visiting the marchioness before attending on the Queen, and similarly Elisabeth’s bequest that Anne receive ‘a couple of diamonds’ upon
her death. Thomas Heneage also kept Throckmorton informed about the progress of affairs adding in a postscript that ‘the Marquis [of Northampton] prayed him to write that he will send answer to Lady Throckmorton, and that he would deal privately with the Queen therein’ highlighting that William Parr was working with his wife and cousin’s wife to secure the Throckmortons’ return to England.

Thomas Chaloner also sought a release from his embassy by way of Elisabeth, which affirms her wider reputation and use as a petitioner by both men and women. The three letters written by Chaloner to Elisabeth do not reveal how their correspondence began but it seems likely that the relationship between Chaloner and Henry Cobham was the source, although Chaloner was in the household of Elisabeth’s uncle, Thomas Wyatt in the late 1530s/early 1540s. Elisabeth’s only surviving letter to Chaloner is holograph, but Chaloner’s reply twice makes reference to the honour of receiving a holograph letter, confirming that this is not the extent of her correspondence with him, and suggesting that the letters were normally scribal. Chaloner’s letters to Elisabeth demonstrate the strategies a man of lower status needed to employ when addressing his social superior and requiring a favour. Their correspondence is illuminating in terms of the relationships between men and women at the Elizabethan court. In this case, as in most others of Elisabeth’s political engagement, her rank and position were more significant than her gender. The earliest extant letter from Chaloner to Elisabeth Parr is from 26 June 1562 but it is apparent that this is not the beginning of their correspondence, as Chaloner begins ‘I do confesse my self Madame muche blame wourthie for that I of all this while I have written nothing unto you. Nowe when I wourst may, being syke of an Ague Terciand [i.e. a tertian ague] I shall pray youwre Ladiship to accepte theis rude lynes in good parte.’ The letter makes clear that Chaloner is already indebted to Elisabeth as a suitor and making known her good opinion of him in an ‘honourable demonstracion [which] hathe moved me of duety to yeld yo you my bounden thankes.’ Chaloner acknowledged the debt he owed the marchioness for her efforts to secure his revocation trusting that he ‘shall nat want your good furtherance that my dayes of abode here may be shortened.’ Writing hyperbolically of his unhappiness as ambassador in Spain he claimed ‘every monthe spent

817 CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of EPMoN, 31 March 1565 and SP 70/41 f.184 (stamped 178), AT to NT, 20 September 1562.
818 SP 70/30 f. 118 (stamped 100), Thomas Henneage to NT, 24 September 1561.
819 Brigden, Thomas Wyatt, 8, 222-6, 310, 315, 322-3, 357.
820 SP 70/38 f. 262 (stamped 219), TC to EPMoN, 7 June 1562; SP 70/40 ff. 215-8 (stamped 190-193), TC to EPMoN, 20 August 1562.
821 SP 70/38 f. 262 (stamped 219), TC to EPMoN, 7 June 1562.
is longer than a yere in an other place. Again confirming the extent to which Chaloner’s suits involved other members of the Cobham family, Chaloner also wrote to Lord Cobham that ‘myne absence from home at this present puttes me to extreme hinderaunce’s’ and that he ‘crave[d] your L. the ayde ye may further for my revocacion.’ Chaloner’s letters acknowledged the sense of isolation he felt on embassy, from which Nicholas Throckmorton also suffered and to which Elisabeth’s letter to Chaloner had referred.

Chaloner’s letters make repeated acknowledgement of the gratitude he felt for the efforts that the Cobham siblings performed on his behalf and their correspondence, calling them ‘a great comefort unto me, in theis solytary partes’ and that he ‘were thrise madde yf I wold not crave the continuance of the good will and opinion it pleaseth you to have me in.’ Chaloner refers to the value he placed on Elisabeth’s letter as a source of comfort but in so doing he alludes to the socio-political value of a letter of favour from a significant political personage in an age when a position in a politically active network and access to information was valuable currency. As an ambassador Chaloner knew that better than most. Chaloner acknowledged that ‘your Lordshippes frendship and my Ladie Marques your Syster may stande me in steede’ and the inherent value of ‘so curteyes a letter from suche a Ladies hand which in affection for remembrance and exempla of how much I ambownden to the same I will kepe amonges my deerest papers.’ Keeping Elisabeth’s holograph letter also provided Chaloner with a physical bond or piece of evidence that backed up his relationship with the marchioness that could prove useful in future suits. James Daybell has highlighted the significance of the ‘political friendship’ between women (and men and women) in Elizabethan England - a concept defined far more by class and social situation than by gender. The politicised friendship often manifested in correspondence, presented as an aspect of the Tudor gift-giving culture, where the circulation of news and transfer of information and intelligence that takes place within correspondence locks the letter writers and recipients into a relationship of indebtedness and responsibility towards each other and where information and intelligence took on the

822 SP 70/40 ff. 215-8 (stamped 190-193), TC to EPMoN, 20 August 1562.
823 SP 70/42 f. 205 (stamped 208), TC to WBL, 14 October 1562.
824 SP 70/40 ff. 215-8 (stamped 190-193), TC to EPMoN, 20 August 1562 and SP 70/40 f. 205 (stamped 208), TC to WBL, 14 October 1562.
825 Daybell, The Material Letter, 86-7 confirms that letters presented in the author’s own hand were deemed ‘more intimate’ than scribal letters, and while one might write to a “friend’ or equal’ in ones’ own hand, a scribe was commonly employed for letters to social inferiors. Chaloner was socially inferior to Elisabeth but clearly there was enough common ground and perhaps a genuine enough relationship between the correspondents that in certain cases - as in this note of thanks - Elisabeth felt that the use of her own hand was warranted.
826 SP 70/40 ff. 215-8 (stamped 190-193), TC to EPMoN, 20 August 1562.
827 Daybell, ‘Women’s letters of recommendation’, 188.
significance of commodities to be traded. This idea is reinforced by statements such as that of Henry Cobham, who told Thomas Chaloner he had ‘emptied his bag’, presenting news or information as a tangible thing to be transferred and held just as a letter could be kept and used.\(^{828}\)

Beyond the materialistic elements of patronage and favour, Chaloner’s letters seem to reveal a deep sense of value for his friendships with the Cobham siblings, which appears genuine and beyond the reciprocal and formulaic expressions of good will and commendation that open and close almost all early modern letters. To Elisabeth Chaloner wrote that ‘the sent lettre served but as the spurre to a runnyng horse.’ Chaloner wrote to Lord Cobham

> Though my power be small this I pray your L. taccompt that in good will to your howse and bludde. I will geve place to none as I trust your L. by former provee knoweth.\(^{829}\)

Chaloner’s correspondence with the Cobham siblings provides a mini case study for early modern correspondence practices, and collaborative petitioning strategies. Across the period June to December 1562, 13 letters survive between Thomas Chaloner and the three Cobham siblings.\(^{830}\) Gratitude for Chaloner’s treatment of Henry Cobham and the Cobham’s participation in Chaloner’s marriage suit are the key themes along with news and information relating to the English and Spanish courts. Correspondence travelling in both directions makes reference to the other letters highlighting that the correspondence was openly collaborative. As well as seeking his recall from Madrid, Chaloner enlisted the Cobhams’ help in securing his intended marriage with a lady of the court, from their home ‘cuntrey’ of Kent.\(^{831}\) Chaloner explained his wishes fully to the marchioness rather than Lord Cobham, or Henry, informing William that ‘[I] require you both to helpe forwarde my request which in my lettre written presentlie to her honore I have expressed at large.’\(^{832}\) According to Chaloner the lady was known to Elisabeth so unfortunately he does not include her name in surviving correspondence, but suggests Elisabeth had already aided

---

\(^{828}\) SP 70/56 f. 120 (stamped 120), HC to TC, 14 May 1563.

\(^{829}\) Ibid.

\(^{830}\) The letters between Chaloner, WBLc and EP, here discussed, are transcribed in Appendix B. The additional correspondence between Chaloner and Henry Cobham are SP 70/43 f.87, HC to TC, 20 October 1562; SP 70/43 f.147, TC to HC, 28 October 1562; SP 70/43 f.149 (stamped 151), HC to TC, 28 October 1562; SP 70/44 f.41 (stamped 29), HC to TC, 4 November 1562; SP 70/44 f.114 (stamped 107), HC to TC, 9 November 1562; SP70/44 f.184 (stamped 177), TC to HC, 15 November 1562 and SP70/47 f.75 (stamped 76), HC to TC, 20 December 1562.

\(^{831}\) SP70/42 f.208, TC to WBLc, 14 October 1562

\(^{832}\) Ibid. This letter was sent four months after Chaloner had written to Elisabeth.
Chaloner’s suit by making an ‘honorable demonstracion’ of her good opinion of him. Chaloner also makes reference to a dream of his that he claims was ‘so notable’ that he ‘wrote it in aboke ymmediately’. In the dream Chaloner saw the object of his affections processing from the privy chamber to the chapel, and he himself was present dressed in tawny garments, prompting his friends to say ‘that they never saw garments better become me.’ Chaloner wrote of it to the marchioness so that she could see how well his tawny garments please him, suggesting perhaps that the garments had been an earlier gift from herself, and also perhaps that Chaloner prophesied his lady walking away from him. Chaloner wryly comments that he ‘have more often refused, then been refused’ and wishes another would be sent to replace him in Madrid so that he were ‘at whome to wowe for my self ere ever my herd waxe graye for then fayre women that ar younge will but have awaye the old man’. Chaloner did not move on from these morose sentiments very swiftly, describing himself as a ‘wyveless wanderer’ in his next surviving letter to the marchioness and later still remarking that having ‘so many yeres spent in former services … it standith her highness ought to leave to retourne aswell to take a wife for children.’ The Queen seems not to have listened to the marchioness’ or Chaloner’s pleas, however, as he remained on embassy until 1566.

Chaloner attributed the failure of his suit in part to the ‘rashe handling’ of the affair by his brother, Francis Chaloner, whom he asserted he had only asked to ‘fele thinclynacion’ of the ‘certayne gentilwoman’. He described himself as sorry ‘that herein this Treeles Cuntrey I can gett no green wyllow to make me a garland of’. The same image appears in Chaloner’s letter to Lord Cobham from October, when he commented that he desired Henry ‘that he returneth clad in greene to were abowt his hatt a garlande of greene willowe and an other abowte his arme for me./ But he sayeth he can not sighe for that he never had, no more cann I.’ Chaloner’s references to green willow garlands allude to green willow as a longstanding symbol of forsaken and lost love or cuckoldry. It may well be significant that in 1562 John Heywood had published his Woorkes - a collection of

---

833 SP 70/38 f. 262 (stamped 219), TC to EPMoN, 26 June 1562.
834 SP 70/40 ff. 215-8 (stamped 190-193), TC to EPMoN, 20 August 1562 and BL Additional MS 35831 ff. 82-4, TC to EPMoN, 14 October 1562
835 SP 70/38 f. 262 (stamped 219), TC to EPMoN, 26 June 1562.
836 Ibid.
837 SP 70/40 f. 208, TC to WBLC, 14 October 1562. Henry was returning to England at speed having just heard of Elisabeth’s illness. The letter written by Chaloner to Elisabeth on the same date as that to WBLC reports their ‘greif’ at receiving the news of her health.

---
proverbs and epigrams relating to marriage and included a balad called ‘A Ballad of the Green Willow’. 838

While Elisabeth’s rank prevented Chaloner criticising her conduct - whether or not he believed she had actually behaved wrongly - Chaloner expressed his dislike of women’s gossiping nature, conjecturing that the women of the court had been indiscreet and maligned his reputation, contributing to his rejection in courtship. Chaloner’s use of the word ‘counseilleress’ to describe female courtiers, and his location of their gossiping or sharing of secrets in the counsel chamber politicises the women’s activity, and presents Elisabeth’s suit for favour for Chaloner’s revocation from embassy and his marriage suit as indistinguishable from each other. Chaloner’s letters to Elisabeth blend his marriage suit and his plea for revocation into one request for the marchioness’ patronage; Chaloner saw both of his suits involving the marchioness as political and through his letters Chaloner himself ties the marchioness and the other women of Elizabeth’s court to the discourse of counsel by highlighting that they shared and transferred information around the court. As suggested above, Chaloner’s use of this politicised terminology is both critical and sarcastic with regard to women transferring personal information about him around the court. That he did use this term, though, does suggests that the idea of women transferring information around the court and providing counsel to members of the court including the Queen was an idea in the public consciousness, that would have significance in correspondence. By relating the informal gossiping behaviour of the women of Elizabeth I’s privy chamber to counsel taking place in a counsel chamber, Chaloner removes the barrier between gossip and counsel in women’s activity at the Elizabethan court. Elisabeth’s frequent and privileged physical access to the Queen is undoubtedly why Chaloner and the Throckmortons desired her as a patroness, but may also explain why much evidence of her patronage does not survive. Despite this, her patronage activity was a defining aspect of her court career. The marchioness, as presented by her balladeer, is the consummate court patroness.

A reconsideration - political engagement and quasi-diplomatic agency at the court of Elizabeth

This section seeks to integrate Elisabeth Parr’s involvement with the Swedish and Habsburg suits for Queen Elizabeth’s hand in marriage into the existing historiography of female agency and the involvement of Queen Elizabeth’s female courtiers in the early Elizabethan marriage negotiations. The diplomatic correspondence of the ambassadors from the Habsburg empire across the years 1558-1565 is revealing of Elisabeth’s affinity with international diplomacy and its practitioners. From the moment of Elizabeth’s accession, Elisabeth Parr’s intimacy with the Queen and her longstanding political importance was translated across Europe. Bishop Aquila de Quadra’s correspondence of 1561 highlights the nuances of Elisabeth’s network of socio-political influence. De Quadra’s comments demonstrate that not only was he intimate enough with Elisabeth to receive information from her, she was, along with her sister-in-law, Frances, in ‘the best position’ to gain information from or about the Queen and that she was also intimate with the Swedish ambassador (Nils Gyllenstierna the chancellor), and had received ‘very valuable presents’ from him, akin to the favour she received from the French ambassador the Duke de Vendome in June 1550. Gyllenstierna’s predecessor as Swedish ambassador was Duke John of Finland, later King of Sweden as successor to his brother, King Erik XIV. Elisabeth was also acquainted with John as they were together appointed as godparents in 1559 when Erik (then prince) was suing in earnest for Queen Elizabeth’s hand in marriage. It is in the early Elizabethan marriage negotiations that Elisabeth’s political engagement as a quasi-diplomatic agent for the Queen is most clearly evident. Given that - according to Loades - an unmarried Queen regnant was a ‘crisis’, one of the most pressing issues for Elizabeth’s court and council was her immediate and politic marriage. The extent to which Elizabeth’s female courtiers had a role in brokering any possible marriage is one of the most significant issues dealt with in this thesis as there is a substantial body of scholarship - primarily concerned with the agency of Mary Sidney and Katherine Ashley - that allows the contextualization of Elisabeth’s political agency on behalf of and in conjunction with the Queen. Presenting Elisabeth Parr’s agency as a case study adds her to the existing pool of politically active women such as Mary Sidney, Katherine Ashley, Bess of Hardwick and the Cooke sisters (Mildred Cecil, Anne Bacon and

839 CSP Span. 1558-1567, p. 214, BdQ to PoS, 13 September 1561.
840 Ibid. and CSP Span. 1550-1552, p.110, JS to CV, 17 June 1550.
841 As suggested above and in chapter 2, Wright, Merton, Mears and Whitelock have all presented theories regarding Ashley and Mary Sidney’s agency in the early Elizabethan marriage negotiations, see: Wright, ‘A change in direction’, 147-72; Merton, ‘the women who served’, 154-89; Mears, ‘The Politics of the Elizabethan Privy Chamber’, 67-82 and Whitelock, Bedfellows, 38-40 and 62-3.
Elizabeth Hoby Russell) who have already been featured in scholarly studies and strengthens understanding of the extent to which female courtiers were politically active at and around the early Elizabethan court.842

Upon Elizabeth’s accession, the Habsburg dynasty sought her hand in marriage, first for her former brother-in-law Phillip II, then his nephew, Archduke Charles of Austria.843 The complicated embassy involved representatives of all major branches of the Habsburgs, including Emperor Ferdinand I, Phillip II and Margaret, duchess of Parma, regent of the Netherlands. Lady Mary Sidney communicated with Phillip’s Ambassador, Álvaro de Quadra, Bishop of Aquila, regarding the suit of the archduke throughout the autumn of 1559.844 In September 1559, Sidney asserted to de Quadra that the Queen urgently sought marriage with the archduke as a matter of political expediency, but could not say so herself and so had sent Lady Sidney as her representative. Despite being fluent in Italian Sidney spoke to the ambassador through an Italian-speaking interpreter acting as a witness to the conversation. Sidney claimed she would not have spoken thus in the presence of a witness unless it were true.845 Reporting to Emperor Ferdinand, de Quadra asserted Sidney had updated the Queen on their conversations, then

the Queen answered her that it was all well, and since things were at this stage, she had better leave us alone for the present as she (the Queen) wishes to see what we should do.846 As de Quadra paraphrased, Sidney reported back to him that ‘she was obliged to obey, although she was sorry for it, as she knew that if she might speak she could say something that would please me; but this must suffice.’847

Sidney approached the ambassador according to the Queen’s instructions. Subsequently, however, she decided she would continue to speak and assured the ambassador that ‘now more than ever that the Queen [was] resolved on the marriage’.848


845 RP, II, CCCXXIV, BdQ to MdUP, 8 September 1559. A translation of this letter appears as CSP Span. 1558-1567, 96.

846 CSP Span. 1558-1567, 64, 97-104, BdQ to FI, paraphrasing Mary Sidney, 2 October 1559.

847 Ibid.

848 CSP Span. 1558-1567, 68, 106-7, BdQ to FI, 16 October 1559.
When Elizabeth’s behaviour did not match Sidney’s words, de Quadra became even more sceptical, and reported that when Sidney ‘instead of coming to me as usual with encouragement was alarmed, I thought I ought not to delay longer in ascertaining the Queen’s intentions.’ As de Quadra feared, the Queen was deliberately misleading the Habsburgs to buy herself time to further negotiate and take attention from her scandalous relationship with Lord Robert Dudley, Sidney’s brother, who had allegedly been the victim of an assassination plot. De Quadra remarked to Philip that he and other members of the court doubted Elizabeth’s sincerity towards the Archduke as she only wants to amuse the crown with the hope of the match in order to save the life of Lord Robert, who is very vigilant and suspicious, as he has again been warned that there is a plot to kill him, which I quite believe, for not a man in the realm can suffer the idea of his being King.

Unable to confront the Queen openly, de Quadra showed himself ‘aggrieved against Lady Sidney although I know that, far from being to blame, she is glad I should take this step, as she says she will make known to the Queen and everybody what has occurred if she is asked.’ Sidney had evidently initially acted with Elizabeth’s support and so was undeniably an agent of the Queen in a highly political matter; the problem was that she continued to act after reaching the end of the role the Queen had planned for her. Sidney complained to de Quadra that she felt betrayed by the Queen and her brother (Dudley) who had been complicit in deceiving the ambassador, and who was reputedly at that time plotting to murder his wife.

Ambassador de Quadra’s embassy was unsuccessful because he failed to maintain favourable or even civil relations with Queen Elizabeth. This led to his recall and replacement with Guzman de Silva, who reported to Philip II of Spain, Margaret, duchess of Parma, Philip’s regent in the Netherlands and Holy Roman Emperors Ferdinand I and his successor Maximillian II. Mindful of de Quadra’s lack of success at gaining access to the Queen’s trusted and inner circle of courtiers - male and female - de Silva took decisive steps to ingratiate himself with the Queen’s friends and associates. That his activity was transparent allowed the Queen to play tricks on him, as she had on de Quadra and Gyllenstierna. As suggested above, Elisabeth Parr had become acquainted with de Silva in the spring and summer of 1564 during her time in the Low Countries and at court.

849 CSP Span. 1558-1567, 74, 111-115, BdQ to PoS, 13 November 1559.
850 CSP Span. 1558-1567, 75, 115-6, BdQ to PoS, 18 November 1559.
851 Ibid.
852 CSP Span. 1558-1567, 74, 111-5, BdQ to PoS, 13 November 1559.
intimacy created allowed the marchioness and the Queen to manipulate the ambassador towards their agenda. She did this by orchestrating de Silva’s access to the Queen through gifts, and sympathetic associates such as an unnamed Catholic treasury secretary, and by playing on her privileged position as a high status invalid and confidante of the Queen.854

The ‘trick’ played on de Silva by Elisabeth and the Queen that led him to witness their intimate conversation has been subject to scholarly attention. Elizabeth Jenkins recorded the event first but rendered it devoid of political significance.855 Most recently Gemma Allen presented the incident as an example of early Elizabethan female courtiers entering into diplomacy, and credits Elisabeth with more significance than Ashley or Sidney. Allen rightly asserts

It is important not to underestimate either the perception of [Elisabeth Parr] as a potential intermediary, or the extent to which both she and the Queen were consciously playing with de Silva’s expectations of information. Here [Elisabeth’s] gender seems to be an advantage, allowing her to mix serious diplomacy with light conversation.856

In her work on the relative political significance of the Elizabethan privy chamber, Pam Wright presented Sidney’s agency as an opportunity for Queen Elizabeth to ‘make the most of the archduke’s suit without compromising herself at all,’857 but this seems not to have been the case with Elisabeth. Elizabeth used Sidney as an intermediary in her negotiations with the Habsburgs, but her machinations were hidden from them as she acted through Sidney, not with her. In Elisabeth’s case the Queen’s physical presence alongside her friend allowed no honourable means of withdrawing from what had been said as she could not deny her actual presence. It seems likely that Elisabeth’s participation in the marriage negotiations was actually intended to bring about the Queen’s marriage, for although Elisabeth died early in 1565, the English court continued actively negotiating with Archduke Charles beyond this time, as if the match were intended to come to fruition.858 Parr’s involvement in the Habsburg suit, then, seems positive and well conceived in order

854 GdS to MDuP, 17 July 1564, RP, IV, MCCC.; 31 July 1564, RP, IV, MCCCCV.Land 23 September 1564, RP, IV, MCCCLXX.
855 Jenkins, Elizabeth the Great, 118. Jenkins seems to go out of her way to depoliticise this incident. Jenkins also seems not to have known Elisabeth’s name, referring to her only as marchioness of Northampton, whereas Helena, William Parr’s third wife and the second marchioness is given her full name and Elisabeth designated in the index as ‘the first Marchioness’.
857 Wright, 167-8.
858 Doran, ‘Religion and Politics at the Court of Elizabeth I’, 908-928 and Monarchy and Matrimony, 26-34, 73-98.
to advance Elizabeth’s reputation and marital project. In the case of Elisabeth’s role in the Swedish suit, however, rather the opposite was true.

Prior to her association with de Silva, Elisabeth Parr was part of a network conducting a complex rejection of the Swedish suit that worked in opposition to the group of Elizabethan courtiers and attendants, with Katherine Ashley at its centre, intent on securing the Swedish match for their Queen. Elisabeth’s network featured some of the same personnel, and to an extent functioned around the curious behaviour of the Italian-born Francis Bertie. Across the period 1559-1561 the English court negotiated with Sweden over a match between Queen Elizabeth and King Erik XIV, but the Swedish delegation withdrew from court in December 1561 due to the persistent lack of serious support for the match. In July 1562, however, a letter was discovered that had been written, apparently unsolicited, by Katherine Ashley and Dorothy Broadbelte to the Swedish chancellor, Nils Gyllenstierna, urging Prince Erik to visit England and continue to court Elizabeth. Ashley and Broadbelte wrote that they wished Erik knew what was in their minds as he would hasten to return to England. They claimed to ‘understand somewhat more then the comon reporte is’ and ‘doute nott butt that his grace shall be welcome if it wolde please hym to see our Countrey.’ Insinuating to Erik that their intimacy with the Queen as her attendants gave them access to privileged knowledge the women claimed they ‘knowe her heignes nature by continewance of tyme’ and ‘we understande somewhat more synce yo ur dep ar ture then we did before.’

Prompted by their (arguably self-supposed) intimacy with the Queen this letter was an attempt by the women to revive the Swedish match for Elizabeth and save her from a scandalous marriage with the recently widowed Robert Dudley. The language the women use is highly suggestive of intimate knowledge and intelligence beneficial to Erik - very similar in tone to Mary Sidney’s comments to de Quadra, as above. That this information is not revealed may indicate that the ladies were not as privy to the Queen’s thoughts and desires as they were trying to present, or alternatively that they were withholding information until a more opportune moment. The letter never reached Sweden as according to de Quadra a Swedish man was arrested, ostensibly for stealing money. Instead ‘they seized on him a packet of sixteen letters from people of position in this country to the King of Sweden urging him to come hither.’ Two other gentlemen were

859 Doran, Monarchy and Matrimony, 32-40.
860 SP 70/39 f. 132 (stamped 119), Katherine Ashley and Dorothy Broadbelte to NG, 22 July 1562.
861 Ibid.
arrested, and according to de Quadra, ‘many persons of rank are talked about, both men and women and even members of the Council and royal household.’\(^{862}\) The privy council seized the women’s letter as part of this packet, and Ashley and Broadbelte were punished by temporary removal from the privy chamber - clear evidence of their loss of the Queen’s favour and trust. It is not clear whether in this case the women were acting entirely of their own volition, or whether, like Sidney, the ladies acted to an extent as directed by the Queen, but overstepped their bounds.\(^{863}\) Both Ashley and Broadbelte were longstanding favourites of the Queen. They were also easily led, and not particularly politically astute. Ashley had worked for Elizabeth since her childhood and had very decided opinions on what was best for her, as is evidenced by her involvement in the scandal involving the Princess Elizabeth and Sir Thomas Seymour in 1548, so either scenario would make sense.\(^{864}\) Taking their cue from Elizabeth’s responses when questioned about Erik’s suit, Ashley and Broadbelte may have mistaken Elizabeth’s trademark demurring to be coy but serious interest, and so, like Sidney, went too far, acting without her support but believing they followed her wishes. Ashley appears to have been the only female member (and perhaps key link) in a network of minor courtiers, former attendants and acquaintances of hers seeking to further the Swedish suit, as is revealed by the letters seized with the ladies’ letter, and by the privy council’s interrogations of August 1562.\(^{865}\)

Ashley acted through various channels to encourage the Swedish marriage, but the Queen’s response to Ashley and Broadbelte’s letter appears to be a clear indication that Elizabeth did not entirely support this action and activity - whether or not she had set it in motion.\(^{866}\) Concurrently with Ashley and her associates’ efforts to advance the match, another more significant, higher ranking court network - which included Elisabeth Parr - was trying to rid the Queen of the Swedish suit once and for all. Parallel to the privy council’s interrogation of Ashley’s network, Ambassador de Quadra asserted that Francis Bertie, a London merchant, had outraged and misled the Swedish into believing that

\(^{862}\) CSP Span. 1558-1567, 80, 257-8, BdQ to MDuP, 7 August 1562.
\(^{863}\) The full context of the letter is revealed by Thomas Dymock’s statement to the privy council and the interrogations of the other minor courtiers involved: SP 70/39 f. 184 (stamped 173), John Keyle to NG 27 July 1562; SP 70/39 f. 186 (stamped 175), John Keyle to Geoffrey Preston, 27 July 1562; SP 70/40 f. 68 (stamped 60), Interrogation of James Goldbourne, 6 August 1562; SP 70/40 f. 72 (stamped 64), Dymock’s Statement, 6 August 1562; SP 70/40 f. 85 (stamped 77), Interrogation of John Keyle, 6 August 1562.
\(^{864}\) Whitelock, *Bedfellows*, 3-4, 45; Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 69-78.
\(^{865}\) As above, fn. 863.
\(^{866}\) The speed with which both women were restored to favour (neither was out of the Queen’s service for more than a month) might support the inference that Queen Elizabeth had some knowledge of the women’s intentions and motives, whether or not she herself was behind their intervention. In this regard the situation is very like that involving Mary Sidney and the Habsburg ambassador. See Whitelock, *Elizabeth’s Bedfellows*, 63-4.
Elizabeth was widely known to be already married to Dudley while the King continued to pay court to her. The Swedish ambassador, Nils Gyllenstierna believed that Bertie’s actions were a great part of the reason his embassy failed, and upon his return to Sweden he put his feelings in writing. Gyllenstierna trusted that the Queen would ‘bear witness to his fidelity and diligence in executing his charge’ and outlined his case against Bertie, including his slander of the Queen herself and begged Elizabeth to silence Bertie and ‘cause him to be properly punished.’ No action was taken in response to Gyllenstierna’s pleas to the Queen, or when he enlisted the help of William Cecil and Sir Ambrose Cave, another of Elizabeth’s courtiers. When even King Erik’s petition for Bertie to be punished went unanswered it became clear that someone or some people at the English court were protecting him, or that the Queen herself believed him undeserving of punishment. The whole story is revealed in a secret note written by Imperial ambassador Christopher D’Assonleville in May 1563. According to D’Assonleville, Bertie was an ‘extremely astute, subtle, double dealing, greedy and malicious man, if there ever were one in the world.’ D’Assonleville claimed Bertie ‘has carried out many malicious practices to divert the [Swedish] King of this marriage with England’. D’Assonleville confirmed that Bertie was being protected by members of the English court as he was patronised by Robert Dudley and by Elisabeth Parr, described as ‘first lady of honour of the Queen and an astute woman’. Rumours about an improper relationship between Dudley and the Queen had been in circulation for years but what is significant in this instance is that the spreading of gossip appears to have been sanctioned by the Queen. According to

867 RP, III, DCCCCXXXVIII, 108, BdQ to MDuP, 20 August 1562.
868 SP 70/41 f. 127 (stamped 122), NG to QE, 14 September 1562.
869 SP 70/44 f. 1111 (stamped 104), NG to WC, 9 November 1562; SP 70/44 f. 113 (stamped 106), NG to Ambrose Cave, 9 November 1562.
870 SP 70/43 f. 76 (stamped 76), EoS to QE, 20 October 1562;
871 RP, III, MCXIX, 630, Secret note by Christopher D’Assonleville, 23 May 1563.
872 Ibid.
873 Dudley and the Queen. As examples of the extent to which rumours about the Queen and her favourite were circulating in Europe, John Fitzherbert wrote from the Low Countries to Frances Brooke Lady Cobham in 1563: ‘What detestabil and habominabil reporttes and shlawnders in these partes of dotche [Dutch] land aar spreald abroad of the Quenes most excellent Majestie that it is mervell to hear of, so that no honest harrt (speciale being A naturall Inglishman) kan beare or broke the saam … thei aar so devilish, that neither my pen nor mowth shwld make ani mencion thearof, if it wer not that the Quenes Majestie myght (according to my bownden dewti) therby parthli understond by whose malice and prokewrm [procurement] chifli soch haav bin raised and broght up with the principal or chief cause of the occasion thearof also.’ SP 70/48 f. 11 (stamped 12), John Fitzherbert to FBLC, 1 January 1563. Nicholas Throckmorton wrote from Paris to his cousin, William Parr: ‘My Lorde. I wish I were either dead, or that I were hence, that I might not heare the dishonourable and naughty reaportis that are here made of ye quenis majestie … every heare of my headde flareth at and my eares glowe to heare: I am almoost at my witts end and know not what to saye: one laugheth at vs, an other threateneth, and other revileth her majestie, and some let not to saye what religion is this that a subiect shall kill his wife, and ye prince not onely beare withall but mary with him…. Alas that ever I lived <to see> this day / All thestimation we had gote is cleane gone and thinfancy passeth ye same so farre, as my harte - bledeth to think vpon ye shlawdorous bruiots I here, which if ygy be not slaked or that ygy prove trewe, our reputacion is gone forever warre followeth and vter subversion of our quene and Countrey.'
D’Assonleville, a number of leading courtiers such as Elisabeth Parr, Robert Dudley and Secretary Cecil were involved in and sanctioned this disreputable activity at the expense of not only the Swedish suit but also the Queen’s reputation. Bertie’s activity here highlights Queen Elizabeth’s understanding and awareness of the power of spreading informal and even malicious rumours, and the political impact of gossip, but it was an incredibly risky political strategy. In the light of the scandalous gossip circulating about Queen Elizabeth and Robert Dudley for a number of years before Bertie’s involvement with Gyllenstierna, that Elizabeth would sanction rumours about an illicit relationship with - or even marriage to - Dudley seems incredible, but is supported by the evidence.

Unlike Sidney and Ashley’s intervention in the Swedish negotiations, the behaviour of Elisabeth and her associates was fully endorsed by Elizabeth as it did not exceed ‘service to the Queen’, and was rather according to her wishes. The Queen’s wishes and personal opinion with regard to female courtiers’ political engagement is key to this issue, along with the understanding of the role of female courtier to an unmarried Queen regnant. The Ashley and Broadbelte letter (and the Queen’s response) is not widely considered to be a significant political event, rather an interference by which Elizabeth’s negative attitude to ‘petticoat politicians’ can be determined. In the light of Elisabeth Parr’s more complex case, however, it appears that it is clear it was not the involvement of the women in court politics that offended Elizabeth, rather the timing and intent of their actions. By attempting to further a suit that Elizabeth was concomitantly trying to disrupt, Ashley and Broadbelte were acting in opposition to their sovereign. The Queen endorsed Parr’s involvement in the diplomatic deceit practised on the Swedish, and at least three members of her privy council were complicit because these informal proceedings married with her (perhaps covertly discussed) official policies. The Queen’s presence at Elisabeth’s side during the meeting with de Silva in 1564 suggests a great degree of support for Elisabeth’s socio-political role. This activity was not made public, but this was less to do with the involvement of women, more the nature of the activity.

874 McKeen, 124-5; RP, III, 108, BdQ to MDuP, 20 August 1562.
875 An issue highlighted by Whitelock in Bedfellows, 1-7, 10, 44, for example.
876 Haigh, Elizabeth, 121.
Highlighting that the marriage negotiations were not the only high political issues in which women were recruited as intermediaries, Gemma Allen cites an example of Mildred Cecil being courted by the Portuguese ambassador to Elizabeth, Juan Pereira Dantas. Mildred Cecil, wife of the Secretary of State and the Queen’s personal secretary was deemed worth courting for the influence she might have over significant political personages - in this case her husband rather than the Queen. In 1562 Mildred was approached by Dantas with a request that she secure her husband’s support for the furtherance of Portuguese interests in England. For his support Cecil would receive a pension of 2000 gold pieces a year. Attempting to secure Mildred’s personal favour for the petition Dantas intimated that the first portion of the pensions would be made available for the dowry of Cecil’s daughter, Anne (later de Vere, countess of Oxford). This and the involvement of Elisabeth Parr in the rejection of the Swedish suit in 1562 are illustrations of the depth to which women were involved in diplomatic and political activity at Elizabeth’s court. Elisabeth Parr’s engagement in the early marriage negotiations suggests that Queen Elizabeth not only supported female agency in diplomatic activity, but that there were scenarios in which both the men and women who served and attended Elizabeth worked together, and in which both of the court’s key political bodies - that is the privy council and the privy chamber - participated. This highlights the extent to which female agency was not only supported covertly but more widely recognised throughout the court as indicative of the increased political significance of female courtiers under an unmarried Queen regnant and confirms that under Elizabeth, the privy chamber was a highly politicised space.

Summary points

Discussion of Elisabeth Parr’s activity and political engagement across the years 1558-1565 has served to highlight the extent of her intimacy with the Queen and her political significance in the eyes of her kin, her network of female associates, members of the domestic Elizabethan court, those on embassy abroad, and members of other European courts both resident at the English court and abroad. Elizabeth’s female courtiers were less motivated to act in order to gain self-advancement than their male Henrician counterparts, as they could not be rewarded with titles or increased wealth to the

877 Allen, 132 citing BL Cotton MS Nero B.I f. 98, Juan Pereira Dantas to Mildred Cecil, 23 May 1562.
878 Ibid.
Nevertheless, women’s political activity on behalf of the Queen was viewed as highly significant by contemporaries, and those acting for Elizabeth could advance themselves and their kin at court by harnessing political power through their own positions and actions.

With evidence such as Chaloner’s letter and Elderton’s ballad so openly acknowledging and emphasizing Elisabeth’s and other women’s roles as suitors, petitioners and even counsellors, it seems impossible to claim that the Elizabethan privy chamber and its women were in any way less politically active than their previous male counterparts (for example, Henry VIII’s minions) as was suggested by Pam Wright. As Allen asserts ‘the role of women as mediators of information was based on their informal status and the power of female sociability to mask their involvement in “high politics.”’ The informal status of female courtiers as intelligencers and within political networks was based entirely on their gender and lack of formal office, but their gender allowed them greater physical access and intimacy to the Queen than her formal office holders and council. It was their gender, then, that enabled women such as Elisabeth their position as the Queen’s gossips and positioned them to counsel the Queen, fellow courtiers and members of the European culture of diplomacy and achieve significant and undeniable political authority. Scholarship needs to continue extending the discourses of politics, counsel, intelligencing and diplomacy to include the personal interactions that comprised female courtiers’ political engagement, in order that this activity can be recognised as the legitimate transfer of intelligence that it was considered to be in the age of Elizabeth.

Elisabeth Parr’s involvement in (but not limited to) the Swedish and Habsburg marriage negotiations makes clear that female courtiers’ socio-political careers and the importance of their political activity extends beyond that suggested by the isolated case studies more usually discussed. Elisabeth’s court career widely conforms to Harris’s theory of familial and kinship networks as the key motivating factors for female involvement in politics at all levels of society in Tudor England, but in a previously understudied way. Elisabeth’s case underlines that Queen Elizabeth fully supported the use of female agents

---

879 Women, like Elisabeth herself, did sometimes receive land grants etc from the Queen as payment and reward, see Merton, 156, 188-92 and SP 12/7 f. ? (stamped 46), Queen Elizabeth’s affirmation of Elisabeth’s landholdings.
880 Wright, 147-72.
881 Allen, 136.
882 See Harris, ‘Women and Politics’, 259-81; Harris, ‘Defining Themselves’, 734-52 and Harris, Aristocratic Women, 5-6, 8-9.
in the conduct of foreign affairs and high politics. Analysis of Elisabeth’s life also highlights other aspects of the Elizabethan court including the relationships between members as construed by an outside perspective, as she was apparently seen as an equal to Robert Dudley, for example, rather than being allied to Katherine Ashley. Elisabeth’s opinion and position were sometimes credited more highly than Dudley’s (by de Silva at least), in fact, suggesting that female courtiers were not considered equal to each other in terms of political significance or roles that they inhabited, and that class or rank were considered by ambassadors to be more important than gender in terms of personal political authority. Most significantly, perhaps, is the extent to which Elizabeth used her ladies as representations of herself, as seen in the Gynzter portrait example and Elisabeth’s mediation between the Queen and ambassador de Silva. In this manner, female courtiers ‘not only acted as their client’s eyes and ears, but as the Queen’s mouthpiece,’883 themselves representatives of the Queen and endowed with political authority. Political engagement and political authority were inherent in and key aspects of their roles and court careers.

883 Howey, 21-2.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton died on 2 April 1565 aged 39 following her lengthy illness. Elisabeth’s death is the most documented time of her life. The documents detailing her material and social situation at her death are the pinnacle and affirmation of the rest of my reconstruction of Elisabeth’s status and identity, social networks and prominent political position across the mid-Tudor courts. The four contemporary memorials of Elisabeth’s life emphasise her reputation and the esteem with which she was regarded, providing evidence of her role and importance within Tudor court culture.

The balladeer William Elderton memorialised and celebrated Elisabeth’s importance to him as his social and financial patroness. Elderton’s ballad emphasises Elisabeth’s significance to the court and Queen by highlighting her burial place in Old St Paul’s Cathedral in a place of honour near John of Gaunt, the founding father of the Lancastrian Tudor line; that is the Queen commemorating her friend in a position of honour. Walter Haddon’s Latin epigram, printed in 1576, praised Elisabeth’s generosity, modesty, piety, eloquence and grace and continued

May whatever more could be brought to her inherent qualities
Be added by virtue of the grace she has.
All these were companions to the living Parr
Cruel death swept all these away at once.

Haddon made no groundbreaking claims about Elisabeth, but his verse positions her firmly within the intellectual and cultural elite of the English court. In the edition of Haddon’s Poematum posthumously printed by William Seres, who had printed The Courtier in 1562, ‘In obitum dominae Elisabethae, Marchionissae Northamtoniensis’ follows the obituaries of Jane Seymour (the poet not the Queen consort) and Nicholas Poyntz, and is followed by epigrams to William Paget and Thomas Chaloner. Haddon also wrote verses

884 CP 3/69-71, Inventory and bequests of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; CP 163/136 - Gifts by the Eliz. Brooke, Lady Norten, [1585?] (a miscatalogued fair copy of the above); SP 12/36 f.? (stamped 58-60), Funeral accounts of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; SP 12/36 f.? (stamped 62-3), Accounts of the debts at death of EPMoN, 31 March 1565; SP 12/36 f.? (stamped 144-145), The note of Sutche Jewells as were sent in to Flainders vnto my brother Pasquelo Spinola and by hyme solde as herafter Followythe, May 1565; SP 12/37 f. 45? (stamped 143), EPMoN’s land income at death ref. lands in Essex, c. 1565 and SP 12/37 f.? (stamped 145), EPMoN’s land income at death ref. lands in Essex, York, Westmorland and Lancashire, c. 1565.
885 STC 7562, Elderton, A proper new balad.
celebrating among others Queen Elizabeth, William Cecil and Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, with whom Elisabeth was closely aligned during her life. 887

Haddon’s widow married Elisabeth’s brother, the ambassador Henry Cobham, who inscribed the family Book of Hours, with which this thesis began, with the line ‘to my kynne all kynelyness’ one week and two folios after Elisabeth’s own familially devoted inscription. 888 Henry’s affection for and commitment to his sister was evident throughout her life. The presence of his inscription along with Elisabeth’s (likely written in memory of her parents c. 1558) and others of their kin highlights the use of the manuscript as a venue for private tribute. This exists in contrast with more public proclamations of Elisabeth’s position within her family, most notably Francis Thynne’s Cobham Chronicle, written in honour of Thynne’s patron William Brooke, Lord Cobham and into which Thynne copied Haddon’s epigram. 889 Thynne’s Chronicle is one of five manuscript proclamations of Cobham family kinship. Two family trees were commissioned by Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham and one by Sir George Brooke, Elisabeth’s nephews. 890 Both men also appear in what has become known as the Cobham family portrait, world famous as one of the finest surviving paintings of an aristocratic mid-Tudor family. The identity of the two women in the portrait has long been a matter of debate, but Susan James and Katlijne van der Stighelen’s identification of the noblewoman standing next to William Brooke, Lord Cobham as Elisabeth is convincing. 891 James and van der Stighelen’s reading of the portrait is centered on the importance of kinship to the Cobham family. At the height of his achievements, William Brooke, Lord Cobham, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports commissioned the painting to celebrate his family and honour the sister whose relationship to the Queen and prominence across the mid-Tudor period he credited with some of his success. David McKeen described Elisabeth as leaving the Cobham family ‘a lifetime lease on … assured access to the privy chamber whereby (as a wise observer of the ways of princes once remarked) [they] would unfailingly recover … their mistress’s favour whenever ‘practice or error’ threatened them with disgrace.’ 892 It was this legacy and assured favour from the Queen that Cobham chose to honour in acknowledgement of his

---

887 STC 12597, sig. Kiii, Poematum Gualteri Haddoni.
888 Henry Cobham’s inscription is Hever MS Hours, f. 39v.
889 Cobham Chronicle, BL Add. MS 37666.
890 CP 225/1, The Cobham family genealogy, Robert Glover c. 1587 and Joseph Holland, 3 September 1601 and BL Harley MS 6157, ff. 8-12, Francis Thynne’s pedigree of the Cobham Family, 1589.
family’s success. Elisabeth’s position in the centre of this well-known portrait, silently unacknowledged, is a representative example of the amount of extant evidence in which she is hidden in plain sight. The portrait and the Book of Hours on display at Hever Castle are known to many including tourists and scholars world-wide, but they were just as significant as aspects of mid-Tudor material culture as they are today.

At various points of her court career Elisabeth was ranked amongst the most important women in England, yet she is absent from the roster of key Tudor figures. This is only partly due to the lack of scholarly attention paid to her over the last century and a half - contemporary sixteenth century circumstances also conspired against Elisabeth’s legacy. Elisabeth’s childlessness and her death just seven years into Elizabeth’s 45-year reign are perhaps the main reasons why her reputation and position within the Tudor populace’s consciousness began to decline and fade. Despite Elisabeth’s friendship with Elizabeth Tudor enduring for more than 20 years, Queen Elizabeth’s reign was so long that a friendship which featured for only the first seven years pales in comparison to other female friendships, such as Elizabeth’s relationship with Katherine Carey Howard, countess of Nottingham, one of her female courtiers for the full 45-year reign. It is understandable, then, that in studies of the Elizabethan period overall it is Elisabeth’s successor, Helena Snakenbourg, the second marchioness who held the title until her death in 1635 (despite her remarriage) who features in Elisabeth’s place and with whom her identity became posthumously intertwined. Helena served as chief mourner at Queen Elizabeth’s 1603 funeral and has been the subject of a full-length biographical study by C. A. Bradford in 1936.

Elisabeth and William Parr had no children to inherit their titles or their properties. William married for a third time in 1571 but his title became extinct upon his death later that year. Parr’s widow, Helena, had as her jointure lands the same property that had been enfeoffed to Elisabeth in 1547 and that she had reclaimed first from Mary in 1558 and then Elizabeth later that year. Elisabeth’s socio-literary legacy was also shortlived. Although The Book of the Courtyer appeared in numerous English translations before 1600 there is no mention of her involvement in commissioning Hoby’s The Courtyer beyond the

894 Whitelock, Bedfellows, 345, 350-1; Borman, 277-82, 356-7.
896 Borman, 278-82; Mckeen, 92, 140-3.
printing of the first edition. The Cobham family more generally has lost its place in early modern politics. The Cobhams were very fertile (with the exception of Elisabeth, although the problem may well have been with William Parr as he did not have children by any of his three wives) and Elisabeth’s nieces and nephews seemed poised to continue their parents’ upward rise through Tudor society. However, the propensity for treason that appeared occasionally in the conduct of Elisabeth’s brothers manifested in her nephews: Henry, William Brooke, Lord Cobham’s heir, was attainted for involvement in the Main plot to assassinate James I and his younger brother, George, was executed for involvement in the Bye plot against James in 1603. The title passed from the childless Henry to George’s son, William, despite his father, George’s attainder. The Barony of Cobham fell into abeyance when William died without a male heir after the Battle of Newbury in 1643. The title later passed to Elisabeth’s brother Henry’s line, but the Cobhams did not hold high office under the Stuarts as they had under the Tudors and the Cobham barony died.

This thesis has considered the question of women’s political influence and authority leading up to and including the early Elizabethan years, in order to highlight that the role of female courtiers or counsellresses to Elizabeth was a very significant moment for women’s political engagement in early modern England, and yet not a new phenomenon as the women who were Elizabeth’s counsellresses had cut their political teeth as attendants on Katherine Parr, and as wives and kin of the Edwardian protectorate. Although there was not a direct progression or development of women’s political agency across the mid-Tudor period, the correlation between the reigns of Edward and Elizabeth Tudor allows the mid-Tudor period to be viewed as one of advancement of political authority for female courtiers at the English courts. Reconstructing the life and activity of Elisabeth Parr provides a new perspective from which to address the role of the female courtier across the mid-Tudor period, and has allowed the development of a theory of how Elisabeth and her network of noblewomen were involved in the politics of the mid-Tudor courts, as well as engaging with key methodological questions. The extent to which Tudor women’s participation in court politics was contemporaneously recognised has been demonstrated. Whether the mid-Tudor ‘crisis’ period (and its component reigns) should be studied in isolation or returned to an undifferentiated sixteenth century, and whether early modern women or female courtiers should be studied as distinct from their male

897 Mark Nicholls, ‘Brooke, Henry, eleventh Baron Cobham (1564-1619)’, ODNB and ‘Brooke, George (1568-1603)’, ODNB for the Brookes’ involvement in the Main and Bye Plots.
counterparts, is harder to establish. The roles of Elizabethan female courtiers, particularly women of the privy chamber, in court and international politics are becoming widely acknowledged and subject to an ever increasing body of scholarship. Similarly the connections between the Queenships and political strategies - drawing on the political authority of their female courtiers - of Mary and Elizabeth Tudor have also been recently addressed. But what has not previously been acknowledged is the extent to which the roles and political strategies of the Elizabethan court, particularly those of the Queen’s female courtiers, were rooted in the mutable and adjusting court and reign of Edward VI. This research suggests that the transitional mid-Tudor period allows the organic viewing of the developments in roles such as the female courtier as articulated in this thesis. It is clear, though, from Elisabeth Parr and her associates’ careers across the reigns of Edward, Mary and Elizabeth that the political contexts in which they operated were very different - both from each other, and from the context or circumstances affecting their male counterparts, relatives and husbands. This endorses Joan Kelly’s claims that accepted schemes of periodisation affect women differently than they do men, and should be acknowledged and revised accordingly.898 When reconstructing the political context for female courtiers across the mid-Tudor courts, then, it is necessary to acknowledge the specific circumstances for women at each of the Tudor courts before charting the development of roles and ideas chronologically across the long Tudor century.

This thesis has also questioned existing methodologies for the study of early modern women and Tudor court politics. When Henry VIII died and Edward VI succeeded his father aged only nine, the structure of the whole court changed. The restructuring allowed the proto-Protestant noblewomen (formerly of Katherine Parr’s court) who were usually attendants on the Queen consort the space to mastermind their own political identities and agendas. They operated between their own residences near the King’s and moved between the public and private spheres, acting as confidantes to each other and as contacts of foreign embassies. The shift in power structure enabled Edwardian female courtiers the opportunity to influence council policy through their husbands, underlining the existence of dual-gendered networks of political influence. Because of the husband and wife dynamic in politics, the combination of time spent at court and in private residences contributed to the destabilisation of the court as an institution that dominated Edward’s reign. The strength of the networks and alliances

formed at the court of Henry VIII and maintained during the reign of Edward meant that
the relationships between the proto-/politically Protestant women prominent at Edward’s
court were able and willing to continue to promote and support their own and their
family’s political agendas across the reign of Mary Tudor, despite an apparent loss of public
or royal favour. Women such as Elisabeth continued to participate in the rituals of gift-
giving and ‘gossiping’ - meaning both acting as intermediaries and acting as godparents - in
order to maintain their former alliances. The extent to which women remained politically
engaged with the court and foreign embassies recognises that they were operating with
political authority discrete from that attached to or possessed by their husbands.

When Elizabeth Tudor became Queen she surrounded herself with relatives and
others who had previously served her and her interests loyally. The activity of her female
courtiers was widely acknowledged and had more direct consequences due to Elizabeth’s
gender and unmarried status. The Queen actively encouraged the women to participate in
her diplomatic strategies and in court and even high politics, consciously engaging her
female courtiers along with her male courtiers and privy councillors to function as
networks of allies and representatives of her regal authority. The women chosen to act in
this way were privileged because of their kinship and longstanding intimacy to the Queen
prior to her accession. Across all three reigns it must be acknowledged that more women
were more politically active and engaged in political culture than the current body of
scholarship allows, and that they were operating simultaneously within female networks of
influence and authority, and networks of colleagues and kin, both male and female.

The catalyst for this study was the Book of Hours that contains the key ideas of this
thesis - court-based networks of kinship and politics involving women as well as men. The
research that stemmed from that manuscript unearthed more than 100 documents that
relate to Elisabeth Parr, and there may be more that do not directly relate to this thesis.
Having established Elisabeth and her significance at the mid-Tudor court, revealing her
role as a female courtier across the years 1547-1565, the next steps are manifold. A number
of aspects of Elisabeth’s life fell outside this study - plans for further research include
reconstructing Elisabeth’s sojourn in the Low Countries in 1564 to consider her medical
treatment and the socio-political consequences of her visit to the courts of Margaret of
Parma and Maximillian II and it would be fruitful to explore the diplomatic
correspondence of the Habsburg and Swedish embassies that for reasons of access are not
included in this thesis, in order to establish how they saw the events discussed above. The
aim of a larger project is the reconstruction of the political activity and kinship networks of the Cobham family more generally across the long Tudor century in order to understand the far-reaching prominence the family contemporaneously enjoyed. The Cobham family were clearly concerned with their kinship networks - which across the Tudor period included Anne Boleyn, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, Robert Cecil and Arbella Stuart to name a few - and seemed to use their networks to advantage.

In the Cobham family portrait - a visual testament to the extent that they valued kin - the family wears black to mark the fact that the image of Elisabeth is posthumous. They are mourning, but the painting looks forward - Elisabeth stands with her hands on the shoulders of her niece and namesake, the future Lady Elizabeth Cecil, wife of Robert, who commissioned a later copy of the portrait to include her youngest brother, the treasonous George, not born in 1567. The aforementioned Henry Brooke who acted against James I and received Thynne’s *Chronicle* also features in the paintings. As David Cressy asserted, the Tudors ‘were chronically fascinated by family history and often knew their lineage and blood ties across several degrees and generations.’ Clearly this was true of the Cobham family, and Elisabeth’s role was central, as the highest ranking and most celebrated member of her family. The Cobham family should be returned to their place among the acknowledged and established Tudor dynasties and consider Elisabeth’s position within her family. In terms of further study, the theories that are here presented of women’s political activity at the mid-Tudor courts, particularly the functioning of female networks of influence at and around the court of Edward VI, need to be fully explored so that the role of female courtier/counsellor is moved beyond that of mistress of Henry VIII or privy chamberer of Elizabeth I.

Elisabeth Parr, marchioness of Northampton is not a typical early modern woman. Her activity as a female courtier and counsellor does not exemplify how every aristocratic woman behaved at the Tudor courts, but she is paradigmatic of what women could achieve in terms of personal political authority and importance. The amount of extant evidence incorporated into this research that documents her life and activity shows the scope for further research that remains in the field of early modern politics. The rigorous application of digitisation and technological advances to surviving archives offers opportunities for gaining further knowledge of Tudor political culture. Elisabeth’s life story seems almost too radical to be authentic as a representation of a Tudor life. She was born

---

899 Cressy, 49.
into a large and significant Kentish family, was potentially a sixth wife for Henry VIII, attracted the attention of and formed a relationship with a married man, was a factor in the first divorce in England that allowed a man to remarry while his first wife was still living, was married/not married/married again, had a husband who was ‘uncle’ and advisor to Edward VI but was later imprisoned in the Tower as a traitor, became a close friend of Queen Elizabeth, and more. The life that she led and her prominence amongst the noble families of Tudor England make it all the more surprising that she has not previously been the subject of a major study. It is clear from the words of those such as William Cecil and foreign ambassadors referred to earlier that during her lifetime Elisabeth was highly regarded. As Haddon’s epigram concludes

\[
\text{Obriuat ista licet tristi mors saeva sepuchro:} \\
\text{Attamen illorum fama superstes erst.}
\]

[It is possible that savage death may sweep away a sorry tomb
But the fame of those things will survive.\textsuperscript{900}]

Above all, Elisabeth Parr’s controversial court career demonstrates that without the reconstruction of women’s lives and political agency, and women’s full integration into Tudor historiography, the political context and narrative of the Tudor period is far from the whole story.

\textsuperscript{900} STC 12597, sig. Kiii, \textit{Poematum Gualteri Haddoni}, ll. 11-12. For the full verse in the original and in translation see Appendix B.