

## **Lady Troy and Blanche Parry: New Evidence about their Lives at the Tudor Court**

Despite the depth and variety of research into the life and reign of Queen Elizabeth I, this essay will offer new evidence of an important aspect of Elizabethan court life. It demonstrates conclusively that Blanche Herbert, Lady Troy was the guardian of Henry VIII's children and that her niece, Blanche Parry, was a key figure in Elizabeth's life for fifty-six years<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Blanche Herbert, Lady Troy (c?1479-1557)***

Blanche Milborne married firstly James Whitney and, on his death, William Herbert of Troy Parva, an illegitimate son of the Earl of Pembroke. She was then usually known as Lady Troy. Her importance for the childhood development of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Edward has not been appreciated because so little was known about her. Her relevance for Princess Mary was presumably less as Mary was so much older, though Mary did live with the younger Tudor children for a time during the late 1530s<sup>2</sup>. The few known references to Lady Troy include a mention when 'Lady Elizabeth went with her sister Lady Mary and Lady Troy to bear the train' at Prince Edward's christening,<sup>3</sup> and the 1549 letter from Sir Robert Tyrwhitt to Protector Somerset which stated ...'that Ashley first removed Lady Troy [...] and then her successor (Blanche) Parry'<sup>4</sup>. She is also mentioned as the pre-eminent lady in the household lists, and Roger Ascham in 1545 asks to be commended to 'my good Lady Troy and all that company of gentlewomen'<sup>5</sup>. When Princess Elizabeth was at Hatfield her surviving household accounts for 1551-1552 show that she 'sent' a pension to 'my Lady Troy', by a paid servant, which was half the salary of Kate Ashley, then her current senior gentlewoman<sup>6</sup>. Despite such indications Lady Troy has been largely ignored in existing historical studies, though admittedly elucidating her exact position has not proved easy.

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- 1 See Ruth E. Richardson, *Mistress Blanche, Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante* (Almeley/Little Logaston: Logaston Press, 2007) supplemented by further evidence in [www.blancheparry.com](http://www.blancheparry.com) and based on primary sources.
  - 2 See Judith Richards, *Mary Tudor* (London: Routledge, 2008).
  - 3 *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic Henry VIII* (hereafter *LP*) (London: Longman, 1891), ed. by James Gairdner, vol. 12 part 2, 1537, No.911 (Christening of Prince Edward).
  - 4 *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Elizabeth* (1601-3), with addenda 1547-65) (hereafter *CSP*) (London: Institute of Historical Research, 1870), ed. by Mary Anne Everett Green: Edward VI, 31 January 1549, letter concerning the Seymour affair.
  - 5 *Letters of Roger Ascham*, ed. by Alvin Vos, trans. by Mauric Hatch and Alvin Vos (Pieterlen: Peter Lang, 1989).
  - 6 *Household Account of the Princess Elizabeth 1551-1552*, ed. by Viscount Strangford, reprinted in *The Camden Miscellany LV* (Camden Old Series), vol.II, 1853, p.41.

The full corpus of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century **Welsh bardic poems** provide a hitherto unknown, and valuable, source of information on the Wars of the Roses and life in Wales and the March<sup>7</sup>. The poetry of the Glamorgan bard Lewys Morgannwg (*fl.* 1520-65), in particular, provides a last vivid picture of monastic life<sup>8</sup>. Most of his poems are in manuscript form and are here transcribed into modern Welsh with an accompanying English translation. One of these poems<sup>9</sup>, a beautifully constructed elegy composed by Lewys Morgannwg for Lady Troy's funeral (c.1557), for the first time makes clear Lady Troy's position in the royal household:

Arglwyddes breninesau,	<i>(She was a) Lady (in charge) of Queens,</i>
Gofrner oedd ban oedd yn iau.	<i>A governess she was in her youth.</i>
Hi a wyddiad yn weddus	<i>She knew in a fitting manner</i>
Wybodau iarllsau'r llys,	<i>The accomplishments of the ladies of the court,</i>
Gorcheidwad cyn ymadaw	<i>(And she was the) guardian, before she passed away,</i>
Tŷ Harri Wyth a'i blant draw.	<i>Of Henry VIII's household and his children yonder.</i>
I Edwart Frenin ydoedd,	<i>To King Edward she was a true</i>
Uwch ei faeth, goruchaf oedd,	<i>(And) wise lady of dignity,</i>
Waetio yr oedd at ei Ras,	<i>In charge of his fosterage (she was pre-eminent),</i>
Gywirddoeth wraig o urddas.	<i>(And) she waited upon his Grace.</i>

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7 See Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, p.167, for a fuller discussion of the nine poems relevant to Blanche's family. Several poems have previously been published, but all were re-examined in the original manuscripts for this biography by Eurig Salisbury and Professor Gruffydd Aled Williams, and are reproduced in modern Welsh with English trans. on [www.blancheparry.com](http://www.blancheparry.com). For other editions of the poems, see also John Llewelyn Williams, *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn*, ed. by Ifor Williams (Cardiff: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru/University of Wales Press, 1931, reprinted 1961); for the poems 'To Harri the Black of Ewyas', 'Gwladus Hael', and 'The Death of Harri Ddu of Ewyas', see *Medieval Welsh Poems: An Anthology*, ed. by Richard Loomis and Dafydd Johnston (Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1992), pp.179-84. Eurig Salisbury, with comments by Prof. Gruffydd Aled Williams, translated 'To Harri ap Gruffudd' and 'A Semi-Satire to Harri Gruffudd of Euas'. He also transcribed 'Gwilym Tew', 'Howel Dafi' and 'Huw Cae Llwyd' from the original manuscripts (National Library of Wales: MSS Gw 452, Peniarth MS 67.66 and Peniarth MS 189, 91 respectively). See also Anne Elizabeth Jones, 'Gwilym Tew: A Comparative Study of the Text of his Manuscript, Peniarth 51' (University of Wales, PhD thesis, 1980).

Lewys Morgannwg's 'Elegy to the Lady Blanche' (National Library of Wales, Llanstephan MS 164,118) is published in *Gwaith Lewys Morgannwg*, ed. by A. Cynfael Lake (Aberystwyth: Cyfres Beirdd yr Uchelwyr, 2004). The author would like to thank Dr. Lake and Prof. Jenkins for permission to use the modern Welsh and English translations.

8 See C.W. Lewis, 'Llywelyn ap Rhisiart [Lewys Morganwwg] (*fl.*1520-65), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford Univ. Press, 2004 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16598> (accessed 29 June 2009). See *Welsh Biography Online*, <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/about.html>, an electronic version of the volumes published by the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion: Lewys Morganwwg (*fl.*1520-65), was the bardic name of Llywelyn ap Rhisiart, 'Chief Bard of the Three Provinces', and one of the most notable poets in the history of Glamorgan.

9 Llansteffan MS 164, 118, published in A.Cynfael Lake, ed., *Gwaith Lewys Morganwwg*, vol.I (Aberystwyth, 2004-5), re-examined in the original, see note above. Given in full in Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, and on [www.blancheparry.com](http://www.blancheparry.com). I am grateful for the discussions and permissions from Dr. Lake and Prof. Jenkins.

Arglwyddys plas a gladden', *(She, whom) they buried, the Lady of the palace of Troy,*  
Troë, a'i llew lletyai'r ieirll hen. *And her lion (i.e. William), gave hospitality to the old*  
*Earls.*

Bu i frenin, bu fawr unwaith, *A welcome was given to the King, Henry VII,*  
Roeso, a'i ieirll, Harri Saith. *And his Earls; he was great once.*  
Gweddu y bu tra fu fyw *She gave service all her life,*  
Hon sydd frenhines heddiw. *To the one who is Queen today (i.e. Mary I).*

This poem suggests that Lady Troy succeeded Lady Bryan as the Lady Mistress of the younger Tudor children and that she remained in charge of Princess Elizabeth until her retirement, late 1545/early 1546. The letter of Roger Ascham asking to be commended to 'my good Lady Troy and all that company of gentlewomen' demonstrates that she was still in post in 1545<sup>10</sup>. However, she is not mentioned in a household list dating to about 1546<sup>11</sup>. A letter from Sir Robert Tyrwhitt makes it clear that Lady Troy trained her niece Blanche Parry to be her successor but that Kate Ashley (who was initially simply the governess) was appointed to the position<sup>12</sup>. Blanche Parry remained as the second gentlewoman in the household, becoming chief gentlewoman when Kate died in 1565. That more documentation has survived about Kate Ashley due to her periods of imprisonment has, in fact, unbalanced our perceptions of the household personnel<sup>13</sup>. It was Lady Troy and Blanche Parry who were also instrumental in providing a stable and happy childhood for Elizabeth and Edward. Therefore the influences that moulded the characters of these women are worth considering for their effect on these future sovereigns.

One unexpected discovery was a possible residual **Lollard** influence in the family. The poems of the bard Guto'r Glyn<sup>14</sup>, who was active between the 1430s to 1493, include a discussion of Blanche Parry's pedigree and confirm that her paternal great-great-grandfather was Gruffudd ap Henry. Under the Law of Hywel Dda (d. 949/50), the tenth-century king who codified the laws<sup>15</sup>, people in Wales and the March needed to know their relatives up to the ninth degree as legal cases were

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10 See note 5 above.

11 *LP*, 1536, no 1187, household lists. The dating of these lists is fully discussed in Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.43-4.

12 *CSP*, Edward VI, letter from Sir Robert Tyrwhitt to the Duke of Somerset, 31 January 1549.

13 Kate Ashley was undoubtedly devoted to her Protestant beliefs. As these led the Spanish ambassador to designate her a heretic she was, at best, indiscreet and could have placed Elizabeth in danger. She was imprisoned at least twice, once for the Seymour affair. As such, she precipitated documentation and so more has survived concerning her.

14 See Gruffydd Aled Williams, 'Guto'r Glyn (fl.c.1435-c.1493)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16598>, accessed 29 June 2009. See *Welsh Biography Online*, Professor Sir Ifor Williams <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-GUTO-GLY-1440.html>.

15 See Stephen Joseph Williams in *Welsh Biography Online*, <http://yba.llgc.org.uk/en/s-HYWE-DDA-0950.html>.

decided by awards of compensation. Blanche would certainly have known, and been proud of, her family tree, especially as they still used Welsh nomenclature. The evidence shows that Guffudd's brother was a close adherent of Sir John Oldcastle<sup>16</sup>, and that Gruffudd himself was involved with both of them in an attack on three important monks of Dore Abbey, the manner of which suggests Lollardy; the attack parodied the Crucifixion and the execution of St. Peter<sup>17</sup>. Sir John Oldcastle was Lord of the Manor of Almeley, very near to the lands held by Gruffudd and his descendants. Lollard beliefs and practices continued in the area<sup>18</sup>. In addition, Sir John's son Henry Oldcastle married into the Milborne family and his land was inherited by Lady Troy's father (and Blanche's maternal grandfather) Simon Milborne. At the very least such Lollard connections would have supported the Welsh cultural gentry tradition of literacy in the family. Certainly the girls were educated as well as the boys and the adult Blanche would be placed in charge of Queen Elizabeth's books. The lack of critical documentation shows that it is likely that Lady Troy ensured the children's religious education conformed to the wishes of King Henry VIII; if there had been any dissent from these tenets then presumably Lady Troy would have been replaced, or reprimanded. It was notoriously unsafe to oppose the King's views<sup>19</sup>.

However, as soon as Elizabeth succeeded to the throne, and could therefore freely determine her own religious stance, she appointed a Privy Council with Protestant leanings. Her Secretary, Sir William Cecil, later **Lord Burghley** (Blanche Parry's cousin) favoured Protestantism. Indeed, on the following Christmas Day 1558, she left the chapel service to show her displeasure at the elevation of the host. Despite this, Elizabeth insisted on keeping clerical vestments in her chapel; she liked and promoted church music and she disliked her clergy to be married<sup>20</sup>. It is surely worth considering whether Elizabeth's apparent predilection for Protestant doctrine and Catholic ceremonial was quietly influenced by Lady Troy's (and Blanche's) religious preferences, however subtly expressed in Henry VIII's reign. Whatever the truth of this aspect, Lady Troy deserves recognition for her rôle, and influence, in the upbringing of the Tudor children.

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16 Herefordshire Record Office, AL2/15 Calendar of Close Rolls, 23 January 1417: John ap Harry required to refrain from doing hurt or adhering to Sir John Oldcastle.

17 The National Archives [TNA], SC8/213/10624; David H. Williams in Shoesmith and Richardson (eds) *A Definitive History of Dore Abbey*, p.27; Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, p.10.

18 Register of Bishop Mayew of Hereford, February and March 1505, concerning two cases in Eardisley, adjacent to Almeley: for a fuller discussion, see Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.10-11; 87-9.

19 For the climate of opinion at the time, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400-c.1580* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.423; Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation & Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press 2001); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London; New York: Allen Lane, 2004).

20 Susan Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion 1558-1603* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.6-9.

**Blanche Parry / Apharrie (1507/8-1590)**

Blanche Parry has been largely ignored by early modern historians. She was a daughter of Henry Myles and Alice (Milborne, sister of Lady Troy). She certainly reached the royal court with her aunt, and most probably, her godmother, Blanche Lady Troy. Henry Myles was three times Sheriff of Herefordshire and the Steward of Dore Abbey, with which he had a long standing dispute<sup>21</sup>. The family were connected with nearly every family of consequence in the area and were related to, and affiliated with, the Herbert family of the earls of Pembroke. Also related, probably through Vaughan connections, were the Sitsylt family who anglicised their name to Cecil. Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley who himself wrote down Blanche's First Will at her dictation<sup>22</sup>, described himself in his affirmation of her 1589 Final Will as her 'cousin'<sup>23</sup>. Despite his illness Lord Burghley ensured that Blanche's bequests were distributed. Previous studies of Lord Burghley's connection with Elizabeth have not noted that the Queen's most important and enduring government minister was related to the Queen's confidante, a relationship acknowledged by both of them.

Supporting evidence for Blanche's position is found in her two epitaphs. The Bacton epitaph, on her monument in Herefordshire, predates her First Will and was composed by Blanche herself. The epitaph on her tomb in St. Margaret's Church, adjacent to Westminster Abbey, was placed there by her executors six years after her death<sup>24</sup>; the epitaph mistakes the name of her father by assuming Parry was a surname in the English manner. Her position here is given as the 'CHIEFE GENTLEWOMA[N] OF QUEENE ELIZABETHES MOST HONORABLE PRIVIE CHAMBER' designated 'QVENE.ELLSBETHS.HEDD.CHAMBER' in the Bacton epitaph. While both epitaphs state that Blanche served the Queen from her birth, the St. Margaret's epitaph also describes her as the Keeper of her Majesty's Jewels, while the Bacton epitaph includes the detail that she facilitated access to the queen:

[...]  
 IN.WOMANS.STATE.WHOSE.CRADELL.SAWE.I.ROCKTE  
 HER.SERVANTE.THEN.AS.WHEN.SHEE.HER.CROVNE.ATTCHEEVED  
 AND.SO.REMAEND.TYLL.DEATHE.MY.DOORE.HAD.KNOCKTE  
 PREFFERRYNGE.STYLL.THE.CAVSYS.OF.EACHE.WYGHTE  
 AS.FARRE.AS.I.DOORSTE.MOVE.HER.GRACE.HYS.EARE  
 FOR.TOO.REWARDE.DECERTS.BY.COVRSSE.OF.RYGHTE  
 AS.NEEDS.RESYTTE.OF.SARVYS.DOONNE.EACHE.WHEARE [...]

21 Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.22-4; see also Shoesmith and Richardson, *A Definitive History of Dore Abbey*, p.28, for a discussion of TNA, E111/24 (answers of Henry Myle esquire to the complaints of the Abbot of Dore; it is likely that Blanche's father corrected the scribe's version of this document).

22 British Library [BL], Lansdowne MS 102, no 94, and BL, Lansdowne MS 62, no 119, Lord Burghley's notes for Blanche Parry's First (nuncupative) Will of November 1578; full transcription by Sue Hubbard in Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.151-7.

23 BL, Lansdowne MS 9, no.90.

24 Accounts of the Churchwardens of St. Margaret's, Westminster, archives of Westminster Abbey; exact wording given in Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, p.137.

This is corroborated below by the Pendred/Pendryth letter and by the letters of Sir Nicholas White.

The head of the Privy Chamber in the reigns of the male Tudor sovereigns, especially Henry VIII, enjoyed considerable power founded on unrivalled personal and intimate access. If Blanche Parry really was in the same position, even though as a woman she did not also hold a government post, then she too had considerable influence. The evidence from the Bacton epitaph suggests that once Blanche entered the service of the baby princess until her death fifty-six years later, she was in almost daily contact with Elizabeth. Permission had to be obtained before anyone could leave the court and there is no evidence that Blanche ever did this. She slept in Elizabeth's room or in an adjacent room. Blanche's quarters were among the first to be allocated; for the Queen's visit to Theobalds in 1583, Lord Burghley recorded assigning her two rooms close to the Queen<sup>25</sup>. Such a spacious allocation was a mark of Blanche's importance for others named either had only one room or had to share.

Blanche and Lord Burghley were at the centre of Queen Elizabeth's court. A **painting** of Queen Elizabeth receiving emissaries in her Presence Chamber includes, from left to right, Lord Burghley, Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, Edward Fiennes de Clinton the Lord Admiral, a lady who I suggest is Blanche Parry, Sir Christopher Hatton, and, a little removed, Francis Walsingham<sup>26</sup>. The appended names do not identify everyone shown and were written after the painting was completed<sup>27</sup>. Blanche was then the chief gentlewoman of Queen Elizabeth's '*Hedd Chamber*', that is her Privy Chamber. She was also the oldest of the Queen's women, most likely the most trusted and she dressed in Elizabeth's livery. This important painting of *circa* 1569-1573 records the power structure at Queen Elizabeth's court, which included Blanche Parry as well as gentlemen with political influence. She stands, as the Queen's chaperone and confidante witnessing the emissaries' presentation of their credentials to the Queen.

With unrivalled access to the Queen, Blanche was pre-eminent at court for far longer than Kate Ashley. Evidence shows that **Blanche acted on behalf of Queen Elizabeth**, often on her direct instructions. One example is her letter written for Mr. Pendred, husband of Elizabeth's former wet-nurse, in which she wrote '*for so at as her Majesty's pleasure the which I am bold so to signify unto your honour*'<sup>28</sup>.

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25 John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Printed by and for John Nichols and Son, 1823) vol.II, p.403; see also vol.I, p.386, where Mrs. Aparry is again mentioned.

26 The painting is entitled 'Elizabeth I Receiving Dutch Emissaries', and is held in the Staatliche Museen – Graphische Sammlung, Kassel, Germany; see Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.78-82.

27 See Doran, *Elizabeth I and Religion*.

28 Calendar MS Marquis of Salisbury, CP 12/59; Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.75-9.

Sir Nicholas White, then Master of the Rolls in Ireland, also noted that '*I have written to Mistress Blanche unto whom I committed the presenting of my letter to Her Majesty*'<sup>29</sup>. There is evidence that **parliamentary bills** were channelled through Blanche. In a long letter sent by Watkyn Vaughan to Lord Burghley on 17 December 1584, Vaughan notes: '*I have sent instructions for two bills to Mrs. Blanche, good my Lord, the one is profitable to bridle papists. The other touching base captains, who make market of soldiers*'<sup>30</sup>. The casual tone of this indicates that sending such material through Blanche was a normal channel of communication and one that Lord Burghley would find usual. Blanche's nephew, John Vaughan, involved with putting down the Revolt of the Northern Earls in 1569, sent regular information that Blanche passed to the Queen<sup>31</sup>. Blanche also received considerable sums of money on behalf of the Queen<sup>32</sup>.

***Blanche Parry: 'Keeper of all jewels and other things belonging to her majesty'.***

Blanche was in charge of Queen Elizabeth's personal **linen, books, and furs**<sup>33</sup>. She has two books depicted on her tomb, and had been in charge of **Elizabeth's jewels** since at least the reign of Queen Mary<sup>34</sup>. She received most of the jewellery given to the Queen as New Year gifts<sup>35</sup>, and when the Great Seal of England was so worn that a replacement was needed Blanche had charge of it for at least two years before it was sent to the Jewel House<sup>36</sup>. At the same time she handed in '*two collars of gold*', the official chains of authority used by the judiciary and therefore by the Lord Chancellor, the principal legal officer of the realm. When Blanche handed over responsibility for the Queen's jewels to Mary Radcliffe in July 1587 an inventory of listed jewels was compiled to provide Blanche with a letter of discharge<sup>37</sup>. When Mary Radcliffe in her turn needed her discharge letter a note was appended recording that her list was a '*parcell [part] of such jewels as were in charge of Mrs [Mistress] Blanche Parrye*', clearly indicating that Blanche had had charge of even more jewellery<sup>38</sup>.

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29 TNA, SP 63 (1558-1782), see the letters dated 22 July 1580, 31 May 1586, 10 July 1586, and 7 December 1586. See also Charles Angell Bradford, *Blanche Parry, Queen Elizabeth's Gentlewoman* (London: R.E. Hunger, 1935), pp.18-21.

30 TNA, State Papers Domestic of Elizabeth I [SP Dom] 1584; Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, p.78.

31 TNA, SP Dom 2 Nov 1569; Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.91-7.

32 TNA, SP Dom 1568/69; Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, p.75.

33 Janet Arnold, ed., '*Lost from Her Majesties Back*' *Items of clothing and jewels lost or given away by Queen Elizabeth I between 1561 and 1585* (London: The Costume Society, 1980): see items 102, 264, 41, 228, 283, 302-3, 313, 315-9, 327, 379.

34 See BL, Royal Manuscripts, Appendix 68, fol.7.

35 TNA, SP Dom 1562, 1578, 1579, 1589; Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.66-70.

36 A.Jeffries Collins, *Jewels and Plate of Queen Elizabeth I, the Inventory of 1574, ed. from Harley MS. 1650 and Stowe MS. 555* (London: British Museum, 1955), pp.586-8.

37 BL, Royal MSS, Appendix 68, fols 1-37; see Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.74-75, 174.

38 BL, Royal MSS, Appendix 68, fol.2.

Among the listed collection of more than 628 jewels in the Radcliffe Inventory were buckles, bracelets, gold chains, beads, girdles, gold bodkins, fans, clocks and sundry items. The furs were mostly sable and all were jewelled or had gold attachments. Books were only counted if their covers were of gold, silver or gilt. Among the rings was a seal ring with the arms of England engraved on it. While there was not only an abundance of the pearls of which Queen Elizabeth was especially fond, the collection shows she also loved diamonds, often enhanced by rubies, emeralds and other jewels. All were meticulously counted and missing items noted. The list for Mary Radcliffe was signed with the observation that '*it agrees with the original*' showing that a master list was employed for comparison. Their value was enormous. That for decades they were Blanche's responsibility confirms the trust placed in her integrity by the Queen. Its importance was recorded by her executors in her Saint Margaret's epitaph: '**CHIEFE GENTLEWOMA OF QUEENE ELIZABETHES MOST HONORABLE PRIVIE CHAMBER AND KEPER OF HER MA:TIES IVELLS**'. Blanche relinquished her charge of the jewels when she was eighty years old, an incredible age for the time and even then it was due to the onset of blindness<sup>39</sup>. She would not have known when jewels fell from their settings and such a failure of diligence would have been upsetting for the careful old lady.

Blanche, in daily contact with Elizabeth until her death on the 12 February 1590 (new style), **never married** and so, as such was a rôle model for the Queen - if she had needed one. In her Bacton epitaph, Blanche stressed:

**'WYTHE.MAEDEN.QVENE.A.MAEDE.DYD.ENDE.MY.LYFFE'**.

It is worth noting that this was designed to be Blanche's final summation of her life for religious purposes and for posterity for, as she saw it, she was speaking to God. If the 'Virgin Queen' had enjoyed a consummated affair with Robert Dudley, or anyone else, Blanche would most certainly have known of it. I suggest that in such circumstances Blanche would have simply omitted this line from her epitaph. That she did not, and indeed highlighted it by placing it last, could be interpreted as Blanche's concerted declaration of Elizabeth's chastity and could be viewed as evidence that the Virgin Queen was that in fact as well as in name.

There is tentative (and I stress tentative) evidence that Blanche may have helped to finance the printing of the **Bible in Welsh**. Her St. Margaret's epitaph shows she gave '*money to Westminster and other places for good uses*'. She had a house in Westminster<sup>40</sup>, and she certainly knew Dean Gabriel Goodman of Westminster well as he is mentioned in her Final Will. It is very likely therefore that she met William Morgan when he stayed a whole year from 1587 until 1588, with

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39 See Lambeth Palace Library, MS 3198 fol.552 (note of Thomas Markham who had been a standard-bearer for the Queen's Gentlemen Pensioners in 1567).

40 BL Lansdowne MSS 102, no.94, and 62, no.119 (Lord Burghley's notes for Blanche Parry's First (nuncupative) Will of November 1578); for the full transcription by Sue Hubbard, see Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.151-7.

Dean Goodman to oversee the printing of his Welsh translation of the Bible. Blanche was bilingual, though she grew up in a Welsh household and culture. David Powel noted in his 1584 *The Historie of Cambria* that ‘*the right worshipful mistress Blanch Parry*’ is ‘*a singular well willer and furtherer of the weale publike*’ of Wales<sup>41</sup>. However, as it was knowledge of English that facilitated Blanche’s advancement, it is reasonable to suggest that she would have been in sympathy with placing adjacent Welsh and English Bibles in churches to encourage bi-lingualism in the Welsh dioceses.

Internal evidence allows us to date Blanche’s First (nuncupative) Will to November 1578. In it she authorises Lord Burghley, her cousin and ‘*my friend*’, to bury her body ‘*at Bacton where I have prepared a tomb*’. In the event, she recovered and was eventually buried at St. Margaret’s Westminster but the reference in her First Will definitely dates the Bacton monument as constructed before November 1578. Many, following Pevsner, have remarked on the curious positioning of the figures on this monument<sup>42</sup>. Blanche is shown on the left, kneeling and her size is such that if she stood she would be twice the size of the Queen. The most reasonable explanation of the Queen’s short stature is that she is seated, but this does not explain the disparity in size. In the monument’s original position Blanche’s gaze was directed towards the high altar and indeed it is apparent that the two figures do not relate to one another at all. It could be argued that this monument marks an important change in the iconography used to depict Queen Elizabeth. Until about 1580, portraits of the Queen tended to be conventional likenesses, and the transformation of Elizabeth into a focus for allegory only really began in 1579-1580<sup>43</sup>. In this context, the unique sculpture of Queen Elizabeth on Blanche’s pre-1578 Bacton monument marks the beginning of the crucial change in the Queen’s iconography – the depiction of Queen Elizabeth as **Gloriana**.

Despite the probable original dedication of Bacton Church to the Welsh Saint Tyfoi long before the fifteenth century, this saint was equated with the famous Saint Foy of Conques<sup>44</sup>. It seems reasonable to assume that the image of Saint Faith in

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41 National Library of Wales, MS 4760B.

42 Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Herefordshire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), pp.69-70.

43 See Roy Strong, *The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy: Pageantry, Painting, Iconography* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), vol.II (Elizabethan); Roy Strong, *Gloriana: Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Pimlico, 1987); Susan Doran, ed., *Elizabeth: The Exhibition at the National Maritime Museum* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2003), pp.175-81.

44 Many churches in the area preserve dedications to ‘Celtic’ saints: see Sarah and John Zaluckyj, *The Celtic Saints of the Central and Southern Marches* (Almeley: Logaston Press, 2006); for a more detailed discussion of how Bacton’s Saint Faith came to be equated with Sainte Foy of Conques, see Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, pp.146-7; see also Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p.166.

Bacton Church, as in any medieval church, would have been a standardised copy of the statue at Conques<sup>45</sup>. So although the Bacton statue has long been destroyed, the surviving Conques statue may show what it looked like. The Conques statue and the statue of Queen Elizabeth on Blanche's monument are uncannily similar. Both are seated, the face looking straight ahead, the forearms held horizontally. The two faces are similarly framed by hair and crown. Indeed, the statue of the Queen is so similar to Saint Faith/Foy of Conques that it seems possible that Blanche was seeking to replicate a statue she had once known in Bacton Church. When young, she would undoubtedly have been a member of the maidens' guild<sup>46</sup>, and thus would have helped raise funds for the candle, or light, which once stood in front of the saint's image.

In addition, the powers credited to Saint Faith/Foy of Conques included an ability to cure blindness, and by the 1570s Blanche may have already started to become blind. It would perhaps have felt natural for her to appeal to Saint Faith, whose image she had attended in her youth. Her reference to being a 'MAEDEN' in her Bacton epitaph held the double meaning of virginity and of harkening back to her girlhood in the maidens' guild. However, Saint Faith's statue was no longer in Bacton Church, as all such images had long been removed and could not be reinstated. So Blanche, employing a version of Catholic ceremonial, used the image of the Queen to replicate Saint Faith. Perhaps for her this had the dual purpose of glorifying the Queen she adored and supplicating Saint Faith.

Anyone seeing the Bacton statue would have understood that Queen Elizabeth was being depicted as a religious icon. In addition, Blanche's attempt, in her First Will, to reinstate a church herd of cattle to support the vicar, also demonstrates ambivalence with the practical implications of the changes in religion. Such church herds and flocks had been the common method of financing local clergy before the Reformation but were subsequently disbursed<sup>47</sup>. The elderly and those near to death often return to the certainties pertaining in their youth but here this ambivalence towards the reformed religion is shown by the lady who was the Queen's confidante. It does not mean that Blanche disagreed with changes in doctrine for her family had had Lollard connections, and she had acquired former monastic land, but it does suggest the survival of a yearning for at least some of the old ways. How common this actually was needs further research<sup>48</sup>.

Blanche's position was undoubtedly pre-eminent but there were other women

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45 Richardson, *Mistress Blanche*, Plates 11-12.

46 Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp.147-8.

47 Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, pp.119-20.

48 For discussion of the survival of such religious ideas, see Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars and Voices of Morebath*; also Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

whose contributions have yet to be evaluated<sup>49</sup>. It is probable that such women were concerned with far more than the domestic sphere and that intervention by these women in legal disputes may prove to be one of the most common forms of evidence. One of the court cases in which Blanche became involved concerned differing interpretations of a deed supplied by the Crown with that previously supplied by the former owner, a monastic house. Here Blanche provides evidence for a situation that could have been very common at the time, which lasted longer than usually noted, and concerned the widespread changes in ownership following the dissolution of the monasteries<sup>50</sup>. An examination of all the relevant documents reveals names and personal details for Blanche's family, friends and Yorkshire tenants<sup>51</sup>, a stratum of society often overlooked. Blanche also provides an example of an educated girl from the gentry who rose to the highest possible position and who faithfully carried out immense responsibilities<sup>52</sup>. She bears comparison with those ladies who successfully managed estates.

Blanche Herbert, Lady Troy, and her niece Blanche Parry are important personages in Tudor history<sup>53</sup>. Lady Troy may well have influenced the development of Edward VI and of Elizabeth , and the formation of their adult personalities. She provided a stable family background to their childhood. Blanche Parry was the constant companion and confidante of Elizabeth I and her position at the centre of the court was recognised by all. Her close connection to Lord Burghley and Sir Robert Cecil also cemented and facilitated their relationship with the Queen.

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***See also: The Society for Renaissance Studies at [www.rensoc.org.uk/](http://www.rensoc.org.uk/)***

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49 See Charlotte Isabelle Merton, *The Women who Served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth: Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids of the Privy Chamber, 1553-1603* (PhD. Thesis , Trinity College, Cambridge, 1992); Violet Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth's Maids of Honour and Ladies of the Privy Chamber* (London: John Lane, 1922), and on the women of the Privy Chamber; Tracy Borman, *Elizabeth's Women: The Hidden Story of the Virgin Queen* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009). However, far more research could be done.

50 TNA, REQ2/127/6: the first document is Blanche's petition, and the third is Richard Cox's answer, dated 22 June 1566. See also TNA, REQ2/111/37: the second document is Blanche's complaint, dated 6 June 1566.

51 Additional note 2010: Tenants' names are given in full on [www.blancheparry.com](http://www.blancheparry.com)

52 Additional note 2010: I suggest that Blanche Parry may possibly be the first woman serving at the British royal court who is known to have been placed in the position of having charge of the sovereign's (or consort's) jewels and for such a long time.

53 Additional note 2010: The contributions of both Lady Troy and Blanche Parry should be essential components in any relevant future work, be it book / paper / article / film / etc. of the period. These ladies should not be again forgotten.