

Blanche Parry & Lady Troy

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Summary of Talk given Bromyard & District Local History Society, Wednesday 8th April 2009.

Published originally online at

http://www.bromyardhistorysociety.org.uk/latest_news.htm#Blanche

Apart from her two epitaphs, in Bacton Church Herefordshire and St. Margaret's Church Westminster, little was known about Blanche Parry and few books even referred to her. However, during eight years of research Ruth was able to discover far more evidence than she expected, with one document leading to another, these being excellently transcribed by Sue Hubbard. Then Ruth found a source that had never before been used. These are manuscript poems, composed and sung by Welsh bards, each with a circuit of gentry houses where they were welcomed as honoured guests. These included Raglan Castle, home of Sir William Herbert, 1st Earl of Pembroke of the 1st creation, and Newcourt where Blanche Parry was born. Nine of these bardic poems concern Blanche's family and one of these, by Guto'r Glyn, actually gives Blanche's paternal family tree. Another describes the royal career of Blanche's aunt, Lady Troy. These poems are a gold-mine for researchers.

Blanche Parry was born 1507/8, possibly educated at Aconbury Priory, and died, in our dating system, in February 1590 aged 82 years. Her father, Henry Myles, was the son of Miles ap Harri and Joan Stradling the sister of the Earl of Pembroke. (The Earl's and Joan's maternal grandmother was the daughter of Davy Gam mentioned by William Shakespeare in *Henry V.*) Blanche's mother, Alice, was the eldest of eleven surviving daughters and heiresses of Simon Milborne, a cousin of Anne (Devereux) Countess of Pembroke. One of Alice's sisters was Blanche, who married firstly James Whitney (their grand-daughter would marry Lord Hunsdon) and then Sir William Herbert of Troy, an illegitimate son of the Earl of Pembroke. Lady Troy and Sir William welcomed King Henry VII to their house but she was again a widow when she became the *guardian...of Henry VIII's children*. Her elegy makes it clear that it was Lady Troy, a charming and gentle lady, who actually brought up the Tudor children, the future Elizabeth I and Edward VI, and gave them a stable and happy childhood. She was their Lady Mistress. When she retired from Court Elizabeth sent her a pension.

Blanche Parry first came to the Royal Court in the service of Lady Troy, and was constantly with Elizabeth for fifty-six years from her birth until Blanche's death. She was the cousin and friend of Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley who helped her formulate her Wills and advised her on legal matters; for one case Blanche commissioned the first map of Llangorse Lake. Everyone at the time recognized Blanche's pre-eminent position. She was the Chief Gentlewoman of Queen Elizabeth I's Privy Chamber and Keeper of Her Majesty's Jewels and the Queen treated her as a baroness. Blanche's responsibilities were varied. She was a conduit for passing information to the

Queen and for the presentation of Parliamentary bills. She had charge of the Queen's jewels, furs, books, even the Great Seal and received considerable sums of money on behalf of the Queen. She examined petitions and carried out the Queen's wishes in the manner of a modern personal assistant. Being in charge of the Privy Chamber, she could control access to the Queen. The residual Lollard influence in Blanche's family may have helped form Queen Elizabeth's own religious views and as she never married Blanche provided a rôle model for the Virgin Queen. Blanche composed her Bacton epitaph herself and, as Ruth has now dated the monument to November 1578, Blanche was the first to depict Queen Elizabeth as Gloriana.

All this, and much more, can be found in Ruth's biography *Mistress Blanche, Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante*, published 2007 by Logaston Press at £12.95, and on the website www.blancheparry.com Ruth pointed out that when she started her research she did not know if she would have liked Blanche Parry. All the evidence now shows that Blanche was discreet, meticulous, trustworthy, elegant, respected and evidently well-liked despite the factional politics. Blanche and her aunt Lady Troy should not again be forgotten.

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