

From Court to Countryside: Aristocratic Women's
Networks in Early Tudor England, 1509 –1547

by

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Introduction

Anne, Lady Berkeley, was recently widowed and heavily pregnant when she rode to London in 1534 to petition King Henry VIII directly for the exemption from a fine her late husband owed the king. Her petition was not just successful, but upon leaving court, Henry had agreed to be godfather to her unborn son.¹ This marked the first of many suits she would bring to the king and his ministers over the years because as a widow with a minor heir, Anne was subject to the feudal rights the king held over her. However, this was not Anne's first experience at court², nor with the king. Anne Savage was born to an untitled but prominent family in Cheshire. After her father and brother died in disgrace, her brother's widow, Elizabeth Somerset, and Elizabeth's second husband William Brereton, a Groom of the king's Privy Chamber, brought Anne to court, likely in 1531. In 1533, Anne waited on Anne Boleyn during her private marriage to Henry VIII.³ Four months later, Anne Savage was married to the wealthy Lord Berkeley, "a match supposed to have been made by Anne Boleyn and King Henry VIII."⁴ The drastic political, religious, and social changes of

¹ SP1/86 f. 148 for the success of her suit; John Smyth, *The Berkeley Manuscripts. The Lives of the Berkeleys, Lords of the Honour, Castle and Manor of Berkeley, in the County of Gloucester, from 1066 to 1618; with a Description of the Hundred of Berkeley and of Its Inhabitants*(England; United Kingdom 1883), 184.

² For the purpose of this thesis, the court has been defined as the retinue of people, including courtiers and members of the household, who surrounded the king.

³ E. W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn*(New York, NY, USA; Oxford, [Oxfordshire]: Blackwell, 1986), 210-11.

⁴ Smyth, *The Berkeley Manuscripts. The Lives of the Berkeleys, Lords of the Honour, Castle and Manor of Berkeley, in the County of Gloucester, from 1066 to 1618; with a Description of the Hundred of Berkeley and of Its Inhabitants*, 181.

Henry's reign all make an appearance in Lady Berkley's experience. The centrality of the family and the tensions created by Henry's remarriage and break with Rome are both on display, as is the significance of two distinct developments in the structure of the court that have come to define Henry's reign.

The most innovative change was the creation and extension of the Privy Chamber. Though Henry VII formed this chamber in 1495, it was under Henry VIII that it became a politically important body based on the increasing importance of proximity to the king. The Privy Chamber transformed the organization of the royal household and created a new center that was second in political power only to the Privy Council. Except in the case of Lady Berkeley and perhaps others who benefitted from having a family member in the chamber, the all male structure of the Privy Chamber did not have an immediate impact on noblewomen's roles in the kingdom. The rising power of the king did, however, call upon a new need for court connections, which encouraged the expansion of noblewomen's networks both inside and outside the court.

The extension of the feudal rights of the crown that occurred during this era played a significant role in the development of women's networks. Both Henry VII and Henry VIII exercised their feudal rights in order to increase the Crown's revenues. This meant that they had a vested interest in managing the affairs of the English aristocracy to the Crown's benefit. While this exercise of power can be seen most clearly in the king's right to the feudal wardships, it also

extended to the management of disputes over land ownership.⁵ The king's desire for an annulment from Catherine of Aragon and subsequent break from the Catholic Church ushered in a time of religious and social upheaval. Though turmoil existed in the early reign of Henry as well, Crown control of the aristocracy became even more important in order to minimize and control the tensions that threatened to erupt beginning in 1527, when Henry began actively seeking an annulment in order to marry Anne Boleyn. This upheaval continued to escalate for the duration of Henry's reign. Due to this need to reinforce alliances, the ministers under Henry VIII became more active than their predecessors in granting nobles' petitions—petitions that sought to circumvent the judicial and administrative procedures that were already in place. This intervention was designed to cement the loyalty of the nobility and ensure that they carried out their responsibilities to the monarch. When the Crown acted against the interests of the nobles without any kind of recompense, their loyalty waned. In 1536, the aristocracy of Lincolnshire did nothing to quell the spread of rebellion in the north because the crown had alienated the established county families continually ruling in favor of their adversaries in their petitions.⁶ This new interest in cementing loyalties and the new method of entering the king's

⁵ J. B. Hurstfield, "The Revival of Feudalism in Early Tudor England," *History* 37, no. 130 (1952): 131-45.

⁶ Barbara J. Harris, "The View from My Lady's Chamber: New Perspectives on the Early Tudor Monarchy," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (1997): 226-28, 36. The crown had sided with his close friend the duke of Suffolk over the legal rights of the Willoughby heir to lands in the county, and supported Sir Gilbert Tailbois and his wife over the claims of the rest of his family.

network it inspired proved to be especially beneficial for noblewomen who might not otherwise have had a close link to the Crown.

The importance of these political innovations has led historians to focus most of their study of Henry VIII's reign on the development of the court and the administration of the government, rather than the construction of Tudor society as a whole. Because of this, much of the historiography of the Tudor dynasty in the twentieth-century has enforced the division of public and private spheres—with men inhabiting the public and women existing solely in the private sphere. Sir Geoffrey Elton wrote his seminal works *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (1953) and *England Under the Tudors* (1962) on the significance of the administration of the government during Henry VIII's rule. Elton was a traditionalist, so his history is defined by the actions of the government above all else.⁷ Within historical study that emphasizes the public sphere of government, one that was only inhabited by men, the role of women and how they might act within the structures of power is overlooked completely.

Lawrence Stone's influential work *Family, Sex and Marriage* (1977) continued the trend of separating the public and private, women and men, but it inserted English aristocratic women into the Tudor historiography at a time when the interest in women's history was emerging. Stone presented women of the nobility and gentry as continually oppressed by the patriarchal institutions around them, and thus finding they could only participate in the domestic

⁷ G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government: Administrative Changes in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1953). *England under the Tudors*, vol. 4. (New York; London: Methuen, 1962).

sphere.⁸ Locating women in this position builds on a framework wherein only men exist in the public sphere and women must remain in the private. The idea of the public/private dichotomy was prevalent in the study of women's history in the 1970's and 1980's, as historians tried to recoup women's role in history and began by looking at their role within the family. It took almost a decade for Stone's assessment of women during this time to be challenged.

The first historian to explicitly reference this separation was David Starkey. Through his work, he explained how the public and private spheres in the court of Henry VIII were not isolated from each other, but in doing so he created a framework that relegated all aspects of the court to one or the other. In his books *Revolution Reassessed* (1986) and *The English Court* (1987), Starkey began to break from the dominant narrative of the Tudor court that focused on the role of politics and government above all else. In writings that responded directly to the model put forth by Elton, Starkey's alternative interpretation moved away from the idea that administrative bodies had shaped the development of England and instead privileged the role of the physical court structure.⁹ In so doing, he set the stage for the further involvement of women in this history because noblewomen were also actors at court even if they were not members of the government.

⁸ Lawrence Stone and Societies American Council of Learned, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*(New York Harper & Row, 1977).

⁹ Christopher Coleman and David Starkey, *Revolution Reassessed: Revisions in the History of Tudor Government and Administration*(New York; Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Clarendon Press, 1986). David Starkey, *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*(New York; London: Longman, 1987).

Barbara J. Harris's work on the role of noblewomen in Tudor England is a vast departure from the previous relegation of women to the role of passive political participants. In her article "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England" (1990), she addresses women as political actors who "engaged with surprising frequency in activities that even the dichotomies of contemporary social paradigms would recognize as political and public."¹⁰ In her book *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (2002) Harris continues to reject the arguments of Elton and Stone that women and men operated in distinct private and public spheres, and instead argued that women were present in the public. This work marks a historiographical shift to challenge the previously invisible role of women in Tudor political and social life.¹¹ While Harris's work has been formative in developing the modern understanding of the role of women during the period, her categorization of their activities has continued to subscribe to the divisions of the public and private as she built upon Starkey's interpretation of the court.

Within this historiographical framework that centered on the idea of public and private spheres, gender historians began to use the same rhetoric as political historians when they discussed women's roles. They framed it as a movement by women from the domestic realm into the political sector that had traditionally been dominated by men. However, this is an artificial separation—public and private spheres did not exist at the time and relying on this

¹⁰ Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 2 (1990).

¹¹ *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

explanation to understand Tudor social and political life limits modern comprehension of how aristocratic women truly operated. Tudor women's networks cut across the rigid delineations artificially created by historians. They were not limited by their role within the household, nor were they defined by how they performed within a male driven political sphere.

Women's activities permeated all facets of Tudor England through their involvement in diverse and far reaching networks. They were active and present in the networks centered on men and women, and had social, political, and financial involvement across multiple areas of Tudor life. Surprisingly, much of the historical study following Harris's works has continued to relegate women to the domestic sphere¹², and, the gender historians who have begun to study Tudor women outside of their role in the home have tended to view only those women who demonstrated active political involvement at court as successfully engaged in society.¹³ They do not take into account the myriad other networks women engaged with and participated in, nor do they deem them valuable. If women did not demonstrate express political engagement, their actions have often been overlooked.

¹² For examples see: Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England*(Oxford, UK ; New York, NY: B. Blackwell, 1988). Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*(Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800*(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

¹³ For an example see: Charles Carlton and Arthur Joseph Slavin, *State, Sovereigns & Society in Early Modern England: Essays in Honour of A.J. Slavin*(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

Just like aristocratic men at this time, aristocratic women of the Tudor age played a vital and dynamic role in the development of their families through their involvement in networks that stretched across the country. They were not confined to a solitary life within the domestic sphere, because even their activities within the home involved the intersection of connections formed between them and their family members and the people with whom they made financial transactions. Neither was their only method of engagement in society dependent on the role they held within the political structures of court. Women's activity was not defined by either of these anachronistic categories— participation in the networks of the household still involved intersecting with other networks, and political connections could not operate on their own, without the participation of other actors who were nominally outside institutional roles. Women's ties built upon each other, and created crosscutting and expansive networks that allowed women to permeate distinct strands of society.

The central purpose of this project is to explore how noblewomen actively formed connections from their interactions in the economy, family, and political landscapes, which transcended all of these individual sectors, despite the confines of patriarchal structures that might have limited them such as coverture, primogeniture, arranged marriages, and the limited rights of widows. Further, I will examine how they deployed these networks not only in ordinary times, but also in times of crisis. I aim to do this in three parts: first through a study of the typical networks that women formed and utilized throughout their

lives; second, in an examination of crises women were confronted with and how their networks were applied; and third, through a study of the life of Margaret Tudor until 1525, and how she both reflects the common ways in which noblewomen created and deployed networks, and offers a distinct point of reference for the tribulations of women of the period. In all of these cases, the complex and far-reaching networks created by noblewomen are apparent.

In this project, networks have been defined as the interpersonal connections formed between any two or more people. When two people form a link for the first time, the two of them have created a new network in which only they exist at the outset. The formation of a new network allows for a point of entry to access another person's connections, so if one person introduces another to a third person, that third person has now entered their nascent network as well.¹⁴ Within a family, all the members are already connected to each other, so they all form a network. In this context, the links formed between individual actors become just as important as the individuals themselves for understanding the actions taken within a society. The purpose of studying networks specifically is to show how these human interactions formed Tudor society.

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The archival sources I have consulted are housed at the National Archives of Britain (TNA) in Kew, London. I have utilized documents from the State Papers of Henry VIII (SP1); State Papers of Henry VIII, Ireland Series (SP60);

¹⁴ Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited," *Sociological Theory* 1(1983).

Court of the Chancery (C1, C24); Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related Probate Jurisdictions: Will Registers (Prob 11); Records of the Exchequer: Court of Augmentations (E 314, E 315, E 317) and King's Remembrancer: Accounts Various (E 101); and the Court of Star Chamber (Stac 2).

Chapter 1

Women's networks: the deployment of connections

Aristocratic women established networks throughout their lives and employed them frequently. Women maintained relationships as godmothers or goddaughters; they integrated into networks through their management of estates and monetary transactions; they were involved in arranging marriages and placement in households for their children; they functioned as intermediaries; and they maintained relationships with members of the King's council. Through all of this, noblewomen were able to maintain networks that could be deployed in crisis if need be, but often times were not. They did so, not just during moments of crisis when the connections established by their marital or natal families had failed. Rather, their marital and kin ties were usually secure, and their network-building activities were usually on going in the interweaving financial, social, and political strands of Tudor life.

As wives, sisters, and daughters, noblewomen were often able to maintain productive, beneficial relationships within their natal and marital families. This pattern can be seen in the trust placed in them to manage affairs and estates

when their husbands were absent, and when their husbands or male relatives named them executrixes of their wills. While her husband Lord William Dacre was away, Lady Elizabeth Dacre wrote to him ostensibly to announce the “deliverance of a daughter” and the appointment of her godparents, but spent the majority of the letter relaying news she received from his Scottish spies about the movements of the Scottish embassy into England. Her report includes the specific locations of Scottish lords, an appraisal of the Scottish king’s attitude towards England at the moment, and information that, rather than ambassadors, the Scots had only sent the bishop of Aberdeen to parlay in London. Lady Dacre also included her uncle’s recommendation for the movement of troops in response to the entry of the embassy. This was not the only letter Lady Dacre wrote relaying the political situation around their home, for later that year she also detailed the particulars of a border raid.¹⁵

These exchanges show how marital bonds were maximized when women were included in their husband’s networks—such as the inclusion of Lady Dacre in the spy network established by her husband, which allowed him to benefit from their information even though he was not able to receive it directly. Furthermore, Lady Dacre’s first letter demonstrates the ideal expansion of networks that occurred with marriage, as Lord Dacre was able to utilize his wife’s natal network and benefit from additional support during a period of political tension between England and Scotland. Another significant interaction

¹⁵ Mary Anne Everett Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 3 vols. (London: H. Colburn, 1846), 126-29.

is highlighted in this letter with the inclusion of the mark “Sent with George Blenkinsop” on the outside. Through her inclusion in the political business her husband was conducting, Lady Dacre also became involved in the network of messengers who were at the center of the flow of information.

Katherine, countess of Westmoreland wrote to her husband the earl in January 1537, at the beginning of Bigod’s Rebellion, which broke out in Westmoreland as the successor to the failed Catholic rebellion the Pilgrimage of Grace. She wrote to warn him that while he was away in London, Sir Francis Bigod had begun sending letters to prominent men in the neighboring county of Durham hoping to incite them to join him in rebellion. In a demonstration of the amount of trust placed in noble wives, two of the men who had received these letters, the bailiff of Durham and Cuthbert Richardson, brought the letters to the countess at once. She then wrote, “I think you should show the copy of this letter enclosed to my lord Privy Seal, if it meet you on the way homeward send it to him.”¹⁶ In addition to Thomas Cromwell, the Lord Privy Seal at the time, the copy of the letter was then seen Thomas Wriothesley, the duke of Suffolk, the earl of Sussex, Edward Hereforden, William Poulet, and William Kingston, which established the countess as a crucial link in the dissemination of information across the country. The networks of husbands and wives were inextricably interconnected, often to their political benefit. The countess’s involvement in this matter was of vast political importance and the directness with which she

¹⁶ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509-47*, ed. J.S. Brewer, R.H. Brodie, and James Gairdner, 21 vols.(London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1890), Vol. XII, no. 148.

offered him advice, which he then acted upon, shows how married couples worked in tandem to utilize their networks for the safety and success of their families. Only a few weeks later, Sir Thomas Tempest noted that the countess was a particularly active political force in a letter to the duke of Norfolk who had been sent north to quell the rebellion still brewing. With the bishop of Durham and the earl of Westmoreland both absent from the county during this period of unrest, the earl had assured Sir Tempest that the countess, “rather playeth the part of a knight than of a lady.”¹⁷ This explicit reference to her political capabilities in times of disorder again emphasizes how wives acted with a great degree of authority and trust within the political networks established by their husbands.

The relationship developed between the countess of Westmoreland and the duke of Norfolk following their interactions during the rebellion flourished even after it was crushed. The following month, in April of 1537, they remained in communication. When the duke was looking for a nobleman to become the new warden of the East and Middle Marches, he first asked the earl of Westmoreland to take the position. When the earl refused, the duke “enquired of both him and his wife why he refused it.”¹⁸ Only a week later, the duke and countess both wrote to Cromwell hoping secure a pardon for the earl’s servant and referenced the other’s support in their letters.¹⁹ Through her involvement with her

¹⁷ TNA: SP1/115 f. 196.

¹⁸ TNA: SP1/118 f. 155.

¹⁹ TNA: SP1/118 f. 225.

husband's links to the court, the countess was able to form her own relationships with other nobles.

Beyond wives integrating with their husbands' political networks, wives and female family members were included in many wills—largely as beneficiaries, as would be expected, but also as executors. Aristocratic women were frequently left money, clothes, or other household goods by a wide range of male relations—this included brothers, cousins, their husband's relatives, their husband's friends, and employers. Sir Robert Steyll left his brother his best cloak and jacket, to his sister-in-law he left “a cloak trimmed with coney,” and 20s. to all of his nieces and nephews when they came of age. Outside of this familial connection, he left most of his money and possessions to his friends, their wives, and his servants. This included 40s. and a cloak to Margaret Atkynson along with a silver spoon and a primer of parchment to her husband Richard, and 6s. 8d. each to Thomas Whitwood and his wife Elizabeth, among many others in his prolific will.²⁰ Sir John Mody left ladies Anne Scrope, Thomasine Jenney, and Helene Aslake each 6s. 8d., in addition to leaving the maids of Lady Scrope and Lady Jenney 3s. 4d., and the maid of Lady Aslake “a bed with its fittings and a pair of stockings.”²¹

This bequest alone underlines the range of women in noble households who were involved in networks outside their natal or marital households. In conjunction with the host of other wills, however, it becomes apparent that

²⁰ *London Consistory Court Wills 1492-1547 London Record Society 3*, ed. Ida Darlington (London: London Record Society, 1967), 1-25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 26-56.

many women, specifically of the gentry or their households in these examples, formed part of larger networks these gentlemen had formed over their lives. Furthermore, the endowment of goods and money to their friends' wives is significant because according to the English law the money would technically belong to their husbands whomever it was left to. Naming these women anyways shows that in many cases, wives had formed the same active ties as their husbands. Whether through connections forged by friendship, business, or politics, aristocratic women were participants in some respect.

The position of executrix is especially notable because it highlights the level of trust men placed in their wives. This role also demonstrates the inclusion of these women in the deceased's networks if not before their deaths, then certainly after. As executors, they had to fulfill the terms of the will and manage affairs with whoever had been included. Sir William Bowpre left his sister Cecily Mordon as his, "sole executor to dispose for my soule ther as she tynkis best, my dettes paid and funerallis done. I be alle to her soly."²² Sir George Barlowe left his wife Margaret as co-executor of his will; Sir Robert Pacoke did the same with his kinsman Isabelle Harman and her father John Pacoke; and Sir John Saron left Lady Elizabeth Johns as co-overseer of fulfillment of his will, though he did not list their relationship.²³ Similarly, Elinor, countess of Rutland, was left as the principal executrix of her husband's will upon the earl's death in 1543.²⁴ In an

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 170.

act that was out of the ordinary, Robert, earl of Sussex, left his mother-in-law Anne, countess of Derby, as his primary executrix and left her with the guardianship of both his daughter and his ward, demonstrating that kin networks formed through marriage were as equally viable as natal kinship networks.²⁵ As executors, they had control over the dispensation of whatever moveable goods or money were not detailed in the will, and they usually benefited as recipients as well. In this role, the connections maintained by women of the nobility and upper gentry can be tracked by documenting with whom they had formed significant connections, and also tracing the status of their relationships with their natal families and their husbands.

However, women did not just exist as corollary members who were integrated into otherwise exclusively male networks. Women were active members in these networks, and the connections they valued can be seen through their own wills and letters. Their actions highlighted the centrality of familial ties for noblewomen in this period, a relationship that began between parents and their daughters. As heads of their households, fathers were particularly concerned with their daughters' futures, and in most cases made every effort to support them. Sir Walter Stonor and his daughter Elizabeth had a long, productive relationship that spanned her three marriages. When her first husband died in 1528 without establishing her jointure, she sued his estate in the Chancery court with the help of her second husband, Sir Walter Walshe.²⁶ When he also died before the matter was resolved, and Lady Walshe went to live

²⁵ TNA: Prob11/31/1.

²⁶ TNA: C24/2.

with her father. Sir Walter then began to advocate for her with Cromwell, with whom he had already developed a fruitful relationship, and he wrote, that he, “desires Cromwell to move the King,” for his daughter’s benefit.²⁷ When she was married for the third time to Sir Philip Hoby, they rented the manor of Wreysbury from her father.²⁸ Father’s also remembered their daughters in their wills, though usually with jewelry or tokens rather than sums of money. Sir Robert Wotton left his daughter Margaret, marchioness of Dorset, a ring made of gold and turquoise, and Thomas, earl of Arundel, left his daughter the countess of Lincoln a similar bequest.²⁹ Sir David Owen, meanwhile, left his daughter Elizabeth a sentimental remembrance of a jewel rose he had worn to Catherine of Aragon’s coronation.³⁰

The connection between mothers and daughters proved to be politically, legally, and socially beneficial. Even after their daughters were married, mothers remained involved in their lives, some more intimately than others, such as Lady Anne Owen who lived with her daughter Lady Elizabeth Burgh following the birth of her first daughter.³¹ When Dorothy Codrington’s husband died before securing her jointure, her mother enlisted Dorothy’s stepfather to help assure

²⁷ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. XIII, no. 586.

²⁸ For her marriage to Sir Philip: *Cardiff Records*, ed. John Hobson Matthews, vol. V (Cardiff: Cardiff Records Committee, 1902), 482-507. For the rental of Wreysbury: *Letters and Papers*, Vol. XVIII no. 240.

²⁹ TNA: Prob11/21/22 for Wotton; Prob11/21/28 for Arundel.

³⁰ TNA: Prob11/29/6.

³¹ TNA: C24/23 (pt. ii). The living situation of the family was recorded in this document from the Chancery Court when the legitimacy of this daughter was questioned.

the matter in court.³² In a similar vein, Lady Jane Corbet left her daughter properties in her will to ensure that she would be provided for in case anything went wrong with her jointure.³³ Mothers often left other, smaller, remembrances for their daughters. Margaret Capell left her daughter a diamond ring, a gold collar, and a gold heart, which had all belonged to her own mother, to her daughter Elizabeth Paulet.³⁴ As a strand of the extensive familial networks women took part in, the relationship between mothers and daughters was both useful and sentimental.

Even married sisters were able to maintain a strong bond, fueled by their place in the network of their natal family. Following the birth of her daughter, Lady Dacre fell ill and her husband invited Lady Dacre's sister, the countess of Northumberland, to their home to comfort her.³⁵ A similar situation occurred when Eleanor, countess of Cumberland, was ill and her half-sister Anne Lady Powis travelled to visit her.³⁶ Despite evidence of the maintenance of relationships with their sisters after marriage, in their wills, women did not often name their sisters as beneficiaries in their wills. Rather, most noblewomen's wills highlight the focus on the maintenance and distribution of wealth and possessions within their immediate families instead of their extended natal families, and their children and grandchildren were the primary

³² TNA: C1/405/29.

³³ TNA: Prob11/33/14.

³⁴ TNA: Prob11/19/2.

³⁵ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 125.

³⁶ A. G. Dickens, *Clifford Letters of the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 172. (Durham Published by the society of St. Andrews, 1962), 44.

beneficiaries in their wills. Even so, Lady Bridget Marney named her sister Dame Dorothy Spring a co-executor of her will, and left her a gold and sapphire ring.³⁷ Elizabeth Pechey did the same and listed her sister Agnes Redman as a co-executor to her will, while also leaving her plate, pewter, and furniture that included, “the bed that I lie in wholly as it standeth.”³⁸ While not the standard course, women did posthumously remember their sororal connections.

Adult brothers and sisters continued to sustain close relationships as well. In 1518, following the death of their parents, Lady Edith Darcy and her brother Sir William Sandys collaborated to secure their younger, unmarried sister’s dowry.³⁹ Sisters also fostered beneficial relationships between their brothers and their husbands, increasing the productivity of both her natal and marital families. When Lady Anne Stafford married George, Lord Hastings, she fostered a connection between her new husband and her brother, Edward, duke of Buckingham. Lord Hastings appointed the duke steward to his properties in Wales, which benefitted the duke’s position and ensured better management of Hastings’s lands.⁴⁰ Dorothy Josselin and her brother Sir John Gates utilized their bond for their own economic and political success. Through her brother’s position as a member of the Privy Chamber, Dorothy was able to secure the purchase of lands from the crown despite the competition for them in both 1542

³⁷ TNA: Prob11/33/11.

³⁸ TNA: Prob11/30/21.

³⁹ TNA: SP1/232 f. 94.

⁴⁰ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers*, 182.

and 1544.⁴¹ She also used his position at court to have her husband reinstated as the keeper of Stansted Park after he was expelled from the office.⁴² Dorothy reciprocated this help by assisting Sir John in the management of his lands, and helping him secure supplies for the war in France when he needed to deliver them to the Crown.⁴³ The conservation of these natal ties often proved beneficial to both brother and sister.

Outside of the deep connections they formed within their immediate natal families, female-centered networks were usually formed between female kin, godmothers and their goddaughters, and mothers and daughters-in-law. Women were especially likely to form bonds with their granddaughters and nieces from their natal families, though this was less common with women from their marital networks. In her will, Dame Joyce Percy left her daughter the rather large sum of 20 marks if she named her next daughter after her, highlighting the importance of establishing a connection with female kin, even if Dame Percy would not be alive to enjoy it.⁴⁴ In some cases, relationships between aunts and nieces or grandmothers and granddaughters thrived when they took them into their households. In addition to her three granddaughters, who were already members of her household, Agnes, dowager duchess of Norfolk, infamously took her niece Katherine Howard in as a ward in 1529 after she was orphaned.⁴⁵ In 1538, Margaret Pole, countess of Salisbury, accepted her granddaughter

⁴¹ TNA: SP1/243 f. 293 (1524); SP1/244 f. 234 (1544).

⁴² TNA: E 314/79.

⁴³ TNA: SP1/243 f. 298 for her letter regarding the lands in Essex; SP1/244 ff. 232, 233 for the procurement of supplies for the war with France.

⁴⁴ TNA: Prob11/19/26.

⁴⁵ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. IV, no. 6072.

Margaret Stafford into her home as evidenced by the inclusion of her name in the inventory of the members of the household, probably because her son-in-law Henry Stafford could not financially support all thirteen of his children.⁴⁶

The most significant and most common way of supporting the next generation of women in their families was by augmenting their dowries, or providing for them financially in their wills. Increasing their dowries was a serious contribution to their relatives' futures because it markedly improved the political, social, and financial position they could hope to achieve through their marriage. Though the primary reason for increasing a female relative's dowry was likely out of concern for her future, larger dowries meant more advantageous matches, which would then benefit the larger familial network with the addition of a new powerful or wealthy family. Grandmothers and aunts were most likely to contribute to their younger female relatives when they had no other children to provide for—either because their own children were all married, or because they were childless. Anne Weston left her niece 100 marks towards her dowry, and Elizabeth Tailboys Greystock left her niece 20 marks and a gold collar for the same purpose.⁴⁷ In some cases, an older female relative might seek to gain influence over the marriage arrangements of her younger relative and base her financial assistance on that tie. Dame Constance Ferrer left her granddaughter 100 marks to supplement her dowry if she married William Sheperde, but nothing if she married someone else.⁴⁸ Lady Elizabeth Scrope of

⁴⁶ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. XIII, no. 838.

⁴⁷ TNA: Prob11/32/19 for Weston; Prob11/16/16 for Greystock.

⁴⁸ TNA: Prob11/34/29.

Upsall and Masham, a childless heiress, named her niece Lucy as her heir as long as she married John Cutte—a match Lady Scrope had arranged herself.

Following this marriage, Lucy inherited her aunt's lands, in addition to all of her moveable goods.⁴⁹ Women were clearly able to maximize their natal ties in their creation of female centered networks that served to bolster the social, political, and financial status of their female family members.

The role of godparents during the Tudor era was not just symbolic as godparents were expected to act as religious guides, and the relationships between godparents and godchildren were often quite strong. This was especially true between godmothers and their goddaughters, and resulted in the establishment of a female centered network. When children were born, they were given three godparents—two of the same sex, one of the opposite sex—and one of the godparents was usually able to name the child after herself.

Grandmothers and aunts were popular choices for godmothers, and this often meant passing certain names along through the female lineage of the family.⁵⁰

The election of godparents was an endorsement of the parents' networks, and established the beginnings of the child's own place within the larger familial network that encompassed the natal families of both of their parents. The relationship developed between children and their godparents of the same sex were especially significant. The election of godmothers served as an affirmation

⁴⁹ TNA: Prob11/20/19.

⁵⁰ James Daybell, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*(Burlington, VT; Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), 23.

of the mothers' female centered networks that she had formed with the other women of her natal and marital families.

The relationship between godmothers and goddaughters was more significant than the one between godmothers and their godsons, because while 54 of 266 women left their goddaughters bequests in their wills, only 17 did the same for their godsons.⁵¹ This reaffirmed the female bond formed through the appointment of godmothers. However it may also have been a reflection of the fact that men were more likely to inherit great sums of money from their fathers while women did not, men would not have had the same use for common gifts like jewelry, or that godsons did not have the same opportunities to grow close with their godmothers when they also had two godfathers as well.

As noted, even though godmothers may have felt less financial responsibility towards their goddaughters than towards their own relatives, because of the great overlap between the two, women often ended up remembering their goddaughters in their wills. Dame Anne Bouchier and Dame Phillipa Brudenell left their goddaughters small sums of money in remembrance.⁵² Benefices of jewelry were also common, as jewelry both added to their goddaughter's dowry and served as a personal memento. Margery Waldegrave left both of her goddaughters gold jewelry embedded with jewels, including a gold heart adorned with rubies she had lent one of them some years earlier.⁵³ In certain cases, however, godmothers could assume a greater financial role in their

⁵¹ Ibid., 24.

⁵² TNA: Prob11/19/32 for Bouchier; Prob11/24/16 for Brudenell.

⁵³ TNA: Prob11/28/6.

goddaughter's lives. Following her son's death, Margery Copuldyke became the guardian of her granddaughter Margaret, who was also her goddaughter. In her will, Margery left Margaret land and a sum of money to support her until she turned 20 and either married or entered a convent. On top of that, she left her a bed with all the hangings, a chair, and a wooden bench.⁵⁴ While godmothers did not form the primary basis of their goddaughter's financial or social networks, these women actively established relationships that, for the most part, built upon the kinship networks already in place.

Noblewomen were also involved in the female networks established by their marital families, specifically mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. This bond often formed because women typically moved into their husbands family homes following their marriages, and if his parents were still living or he had unmarried sisters, they would reside there as well. While the men of the household would spend a significant amount of time away from home on political or economic business, women would remain in the home together. In some cases, mothers-in-law functioned as guides for the younger women, and were able to teach them how to run a household, as they would be expected to do throughout their marriages.⁵⁵ Lady Anne Lestrangle's account book shows that she began to include her daughter-in-law Ellen in the management of the household and the grounds. Ellen was married to Anne's eldest son Nicholas, and would therefore

⁵⁴ TNA: Prob11/22/32.

⁵⁵ Daybell, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*, 39.

be expected to take over the administration of Hunstanton one day.⁵⁶ Lady Anne's sister-in-law Catherine Hastings also visited frequently, either with her husband or alone, and would stay for up to a week. These frequent periods of prolonged interaction suggest the development of an important, probably amiable relationship between the two women.⁵⁷

Female friendships also developed and women were able to establish caring relationships independent of their marital or natal kinship ties. These networks can be traced in the families that kept detailed accounts of their visitors, such as the Lestranges and the Rutlands. Several noblewomen visited Lady Anne Lestrangle over the years, and all of them lived within 40 miles of Hunstanton where she resided. Lady Elizabeth Robsart and Lady Anne Shelton, the cousin of Anne Boleyn, both visited in 1519 and again in 1526, which suggests that these women had created a long-lasting friendship.⁵⁸ By the time of her visit in 1526, Anne Shelton was known as Anne Knyvett following her marriage. During this visit, her aunt Lady Elizabeth Boleyn, who was Anne Boleyn's mother, accompanied her. This addition demonstrates how women's friendships could be utilized to expand their networks through the introduction and inclusion of other women. That same year social visits to Hunstanton were also made by Ladies Catherine and Anne Lovell and their husbands, Lady Grace Bedingfield,

⁵⁶ Daniel Gurney, *Household and Privy Purse Accounts of the Lestranges of Hunstanton from A.D. 1519 to A.D. 1578* (London: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1834), 20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 13, 20, 73.

and Lady Elizabeth Steward who was accompanied by her husband and her brother.⁵⁹

Evidence of a friendship between the countess of Rutland and Lady Coffin exists in the exchange of presents such as “pasties of baked cranes” between the two women following their tenure as ladies in Jane Seymour’s Privy Chamber.⁶⁰ The countess also developed a friendship with the duchess of Suffolk, again following their time together in the queen’s Privy Chamber. The duchess visited the countess at least once, and in 1539 the countess named her daughter Katherine. She was likely named for the duchess because both the duke and duchess of Suffolk were present at her baptism.⁶¹ The friendships that women formed demonstrate how they were able to construct meaningful connections outside of the home—women were not limited to the linkages they could form within their own households.

These networks also formed during pregnancy and childbirth, which marked a unique social bonding ritual. In the weeks leading up to the birth, and following it, the pregnant woman would be sequestered from the main social functions of her household, and would instead remain in bed surrounded only by other women. A woman’s lying in began right before the birth itself, and as soon as it started, the space became both physically and symbolically closed off to men as the bedroom was transformed into a lying-in chamber. The keyholes were blocked up to prevent air from entering the room, and heavy curtains were put

⁵⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁶⁰ *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland Preserved at Belvoir Castle*, ed. HMC, vol. IV (London: Mackie and Co., 1905), 294.

⁶¹ Ibid., 293.

up to block out all natural light, so the only source of light were the many candles in the room.⁶²

Ladies would take care to arrange the birthing room in the lead up to their lying in periods. Thomas Cromwell gave 44l and 15s. to his daughter-in-law Elizabeth for the things “she needed at her lying down.”⁶³ Arranging the lying in chamber could also involve the utilization of a woman’s networks, as women would lend each other bedding and clothes for the duration of the lying in. Lady Lisle wrote to Anne the countess of Rutland and Lady Sussex to this effect. The countess sent a “great chest” for her use, but Lady Sussex had already lent her great bedding of cloth of gold and trimmed in ermine to Lady Beauchamp who had not yet been churched.⁶⁴

The entire period of the lying in could last for about a month, depending on the health of the mother. There were three periods of recovery in the lying-in chamber: initially the woman would remain lying down in bed, then begin walking around her chamber, and then she would leave her chamber and have control of the home again. Even then, she still had to remain inside until her churching, when she went to church to give thanks for the birth and was deemed ready to resume the functions of traditional society.⁶⁵ In 1536, the countess of Rutland’s entire lying in from birth to churching only lasted fifteen days; a

⁶² Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England*(GB: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 157.

⁶³ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. XIV, no. 117.

⁶⁴ M. St Clare Byrne, *The Lisle Letters*, vol. 4(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 866-72.

⁶⁵ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers*, 104.

decade later Lady Anne Petre was exceptionally ill after giving birth and had to remain lying in bed for two weeks before she could even begin to walk around.⁶⁶ During this time, women were able to strengthen their networks in an exclusively female space.

The extension of networks during this crucial stage in a Tudor woman's life can be seen during the course of the pregnancy of Lady Anne Neville. She was the daughter of the earl of Rutland, and wife of Henry Neville, who was the eldest son and heir of the earl of Westmoreland. She was married when she was nine, and pregnant by the time she was fourteen, so she remained in her parent's home during the pregnancy.⁶⁷ Anne had "a present of fish at times" delivered to her by the wife of one of the earl's servants; "a dossen styntes and a dyshe of cokylles" were sent by Master Brasbryge; Lady Markham sent a gift of "a lamprey, a pike, and a great salmon trowtte"; and Mistress Leek brought "a roo to my Lady Nevell." Lady Neville's parents rewarded all of the servants delivering these gifts, but Anne herself also rewarded a servant who delivered a present from Austen Porter during her lying in, another who brought her pheasants from Master Thurland, and finally a servant who delivered strawberries sent by Master Sturley.⁶⁸ Anne Neville's pregnancy formed the center of a new network of gift giving. These gifts were sent by members of the

⁶⁶ F. G. Emmison, *Tudor Secretary: Sir William Petre at Court and Home* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1961), 124. *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland Preserved at Belvoir Castle*, IV, 287.

⁶⁷ *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland Preserved at Belvoir Castle*, IV, 282. She was born in 1527, in 1536 the earl of Rutland detailed payments for her marriage and the service of a priest, and in 1540 she gave birth.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 295-96, 302.

gentry who lived nearby, so while they may have been designed to curry favor with Anne's father the earl, Anne herself was a similarly important figure of the upper nobility as the future countess of Westmoreland, and many members of the gentry would have found it beneficial to be connected to her. She was equally involved in dispensing out rewards following the gifts, so she was aware who had sent them and would be able to integrate them into her networks in the future if she desired. The countess of Westmoreland, Anne's mother-in-law demonstrated another social aspect of childbirth, as she planned a trip to attend the birth at Belvoir Castle where Anne was living too witness the birth of her grandchild.⁶⁹

Despite Lady Anne Neville's experience, most women gave birth in the homes they shared with their husbands. Marital connections were drawn upon during childbirth quite often. Lady Ursula Stafford gave birth at Thornbury Castle, her marital family home, and her mother-in-law supervised her lying in.⁷⁰ During Lady Anne Lestrangle's third pregnancy, two of her husband's aunts, Lady Elizabeth Woodhouse and Mrs. Banyard attended to her because her own mother was dead and her mother-in-law had remarried and no longer resided nearby.⁷¹ The period of lying in and the birth itself were exclusively female affairs, and women relied on both their natal and marital networks to get through what could be an immensely difficult time. The experience provided a uniquely female space for social interaction and required a certain amount of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 296, 305.

⁷⁰ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. III, no. 4.

⁷¹ Gurney, *Household and Privy Purse Accounts of the Lestranges of Hunstanton from A.D. 1519 to A.D. 1578*, 79.

physical closeness as they remained in their chambers for the duration. While men were actively involved in the networks of gift giving that surrounded the pregnancy, the birthing chamber itself offered a specific period during which women might form their own connections.

Within their familial networks, women also acted as intermediaries. In this capacity, women were approached for the political importance they might exert in their own right over their male family members or husbands. When Lady Elizabeth Dacre wanted to borrow 10 marks from her brother Francis, the earl of Shrewsbury, she did not write directly to him. Rather, she wrote to her sister-in-law for help stating that she desired, “your good ladyship to be a mean to my lord, your husband, to stand so good a lord unto me at this present.” In terms of repayment, Lady Dacre offers to, “send it unto your good ladyship,” instead of sending the money to her brother. This plea proved successful, as only a week later Lady Dacre wrote another letter thanking her brother for the money.⁷² Through this exchange it becomes apparent that the connection Lady Dacre and the countess of Shrewsbury had developed was strong enough to warrant this demonstration of financial vulnerability. However, it also shows how wives were able to act as successful financial intermediaries between their husbands and, in this case, other members of their familial network.

Women could also be political intermediaries based on their other family connections. Lady Elizabeth Ughtred was Jane Seymour’s widowed sister and,

⁷² Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 270-72.

because of this connection, she was sought after for her potential to intervene with the king. In 1536, Sir Arthur Darcy wrote to her hoping she would be able to help him secure parsonage lands from the king, and in exchange promised her 100 marks and a velvet bed. During this exchange, Lady Ughtred's sex was not forgotten, and Sir Arthur turned the letter into a half-hearted marriage proposal. He wrote, "If I do tarry here in this country I would have been glad to have had you likewise; but sure it is, as I said, that some southern lord shall make you forget the north."⁷³ Though he recognized the political value her marriage would have, his primary goal was her immediate political capital and how it could benefit him financially. In certain situations, outsiders looked to utilize noblewomen's networks for their own profit.

Even within the home, women were actively involved in the administration and managing the finances of their estates—a position that created ample opportunity for women to become involved in financial networks outside the home. In the 1520s, even while her mother-in-law still ran the household, Lady Anne Lestrangle had some involvement in the management of the household. She ordered clothing for her children and was given money to manage their expenses and her own.⁷⁴ However, following her father-in-law's death and mother-in-law's subsequent remarriage, Lady Lestrangle became responsible for managing the household. At the same time, the ascension of Anne Boleyn at court also signaled her husband Sir Thomas Lestrangle's political rise due to his

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁷⁴ Gurney, *Household and Privy Purse Accounts of the Lestranges of Hunstanton from A.D. 1519 to A.D. 1578*, 25.

support for the king's divorce. He was present at Henry and Anne's wedding and at Anne's coronation in 1533 and following this was often at court rather than Hunstanton.⁷⁵ Due to his frequent absence from home, Lady Lestrangle had sole responsibility for the administration of their estate, including external financial matters, such as the paying of dowries, which usually would have been presided over by her husband. From 1530 to 1533, she managed all the household accounts, noted by the recurrence of references to "my husband Thomas le Strange" and "my son."⁷⁶ During this time she collected the rents and tithes from their tenants, the money the Abbot of Ramsey owed her husband, and the profits from the malt and wood sold from their property.⁷⁷ These were ongoing connections because she collected from the same people every year, resulting in lasting financial relationships. She was also in charge of the internal management of Hunstanton. Lady Lestrangle managed everything from the "Shoying of the cart horses with other charges belongyng to the husbondrye," and "The costs of the shepe," to "Gere bought for the chyldren" and "the payment of my doughter Ales marriage money."⁷⁸ Again many of these vendors were frequented on multiple occasions, allowing for the establishment of more solid connections. The connections formed during the management of an aristocratic household were extensive as she had dealings with a wide array of people to whom she owed money and from whom she had to collect money. The extent of Lady Lestrangle's involvement in the management of her household and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 122.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 96-97.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 123-24, 34.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 135, 41.

administration of the estate highlights how women were able to participate in the wider landscape of financial transactions. While these were not foundational networks in any lady's life, this participation in the economy created the opportunity for women to further develop network connections.

Women who were often at court were also able to participate in the financial networks established through estate administration although to a lesser extent. Eleanor the Countess of Rutland spent most of her time at court likely beginning her service with Anne Boleyn, then Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves and finally Catherine Howard.⁷⁹ Due to the amount of time she spent away from her home at Belvoir Castle, the countess was less involved in the day-to-day management of the household than the ladies who did not frequent the court. Despite this, she was involved in administration of the finances when she was at Belvoir and maintained her own accounts. In 1532 she received her husband's fee from the Abbot of Croyland "for the stywardship of the same hous;" she provided the dowry for her sister-in-law "in full payment of the couvenantes of marriage;" and paid the prioress of Halywell "for the kepinge of the aniversares for my Lorde's fader and broder."⁸⁰ Larger payments like these were infrequent, she was more likely to make smaller payments to purchase pearls "for a garter for my Lorde,"

⁷⁹ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 168-69. The countess refers to travelling with Anne at Enfield and her husband was in favor with Henry, so it is likely she had a position as one of Anne's ladies, but there is no surviving record of Anne's entire household. Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, 198.

⁸⁰ *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland Preserved at Belvoir Castle*, IV, 273-74.

or “a bowe and arrows for my Lady Anne.”⁸¹ Though still a participant in the financial networks that formed around household administration, this was a lesser network for ladies at court because they had to control everything from a distance.

Outside of familial networks, women were also involved in the land transfers that were central to the finances of the English nobility. Through these routine land transactions, they were able to act within the larger networks created by the acquisition and rental of lands and manors. Lady Elizabeth Legh paid 12d. for a small tenement in Gresslake, which was the “county of the said Thomas Meddleton as of his manor of Bethome.”⁸² Lady Katherine Strykland was involved in several transactions within the Barony of Kendale. In the early 1530’s she leased the Manor of Thorton with the lands there as well as lands in Norton, Milby, and Humberton from Lord Henry Clyfford.⁸³ Later in the decade, she leased the tithes of Natland, Whynefell, Croscrake, Lawkryge, and Sysyrehe from William Dent, the abbot of St. Mary’s in York.⁸⁴ After she was widowed, Lady Elizabeth Styrlley rented a manor and three old chantry houses from the knight William Poulett. In the same year, another widow, Katherine Borough, rented the Manor of Holey from John West.⁸⁵ Lady Matilda Sherbourne and her husband Richard sold properties in August of 1546 to Elizabeth Rodes, a

⁸¹ Ibid., 271.

⁸² *Records Relating to the Barony of Kendale*, ed. William Farrer and John F Curwen, vol. II (Kendal: Titus Wilson and Son, 1887), 211-38.

⁸³ *Feet of Fines of the Tudor Period [Yorks]: Part 1, 1486-1571*, ed. Francis Collins (Leeds: Yorkshire Archeological Society, 1887), 58-73.

⁸⁴ *Records Relating to the Barony of Kendale*, II, 190-201.

⁸⁵ *Feet of Fines of the Tudor Period [Yorks]: Part 1, 1486-1571*, 73-91.

widow, and Richard and Alice Haghton.⁸⁶ Higher-ranking noblewomen were also active in the exchange of lands and rents. Lady Gertrude Courtenay, Marchioness of Exeter, and her husband the marquis rented premises in Woxbridge and Edelmeton. Lady Elizabeth Somerset, Countess of Worcester, and her husband Henry Somerset, earl of Worcester, rented premises in the parishes of St. Clement Danes and of St. Mary le Strond. Lady Katherine Neville, Countess of Westmoreland and her husband leased properties in the parish of St. Olave.⁸⁷ While these women acted with their husbands rather than by themselves, they still formed part of the network created through this exchange because their names were also on the legal documents.

While transactions such as these did not create networks that could be used for the explicit benefit of either party, the establishment of networks based on connections to the land is significant because these leases were often designed to last for the lifetime of the renter, ensuring a continual tie between these people. These leases also demonstrate the ways in which women were involved in the formation of networks outside of the home—they were active in the establishment of networks with their neighbors and tenants. The fact that these were business transactions also highlights the larger domain that women operated in during this period; their networks were not solely based on their domestic roles within the familial sphere.

⁸⁶ *Final Concords for Lancashire, Part Iv, 1509-1558*, ed. William Farrer (Edinburgh: Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1910), 25-52.

⁸⁷ *A Calendar to the Feet of Fines for London and Middlesex: Vol Ii, Henry Vii - 12 Elizabeth*, ed. W.J. Hardy and W. Page (London: Hardy & Page, 1893), 16-68.

During Henry VIII's reign, women were especially able to act within the networks established by the king's ministers—most notably Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell became the king's chief minister and principal secretary in 1534, following years of service to Henry. Cromwell managed to persuade the House of Commons to declare Henry head of the Church in 1532, and by 1533 Henry had his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled and was married to Anne Boleyn. Even before his official appointment as chief minister, Cromwell had been acting as such, and had become involved in the increasingly important networks stemming from court. Cromwell was an especially able minister, and as the chief architect of the religious reformation, he was especially interested in ensuring that the nobility helped the Crown maintain peace despite the rising tensions. Because of this, he was extensively involved in granting the petitions of the nobility, hoping to assure their loyalty. Due to his capacity for building these broad networks, from 1532 until 1540 when he was executed for treason, Cromwell became central in many noblewomen's networks. He was most useful as an intermediary for nobles, either with their peers or with the king, because he had well developed networks that he could draw upon, and enough power at court to prove a formidable ally.

Noblewomen often procured Cromwell's assistance when they needed an intermediary to resolve their minor disputes with other nobles. Lady Catherine Fitz-Alan wrote to Cromwell in 1537 regarding payment for a broken engagement. She had been contracted to Henry, marquis of Dorset, but he had repudiated the match and instead married Frances Brandon, the Duke of

Suffolk's daughter. In recompense, and to ensure the matter did not become a legal issue, his mother was required to pay 4,000 marks in yearly installments of 300. However, this was much disputed, and Lady Fitz-Alan called upon Cromwell based on, "the promise that your lordship made to me that I should be no loser therein," when the marquis began requesting she pay him instead.⁸⁸ Following Cromwell's successful intervention with the marchioness of Dorset a few months later, Lady Fitz-Alan again wrote to thank him and as a result of his help and added, "I have more confidence and trust in your goodness towards me than I have in any other of my friends."⁸⁹ Cromwell was also called upon to mediate a land dispute between Anne, the dowager-countess of Oxford, and Robert Tyrrel, a servant of the bishop of Winchester, in order to prevent the matter going to an open court of law. This appears to have been a long-standing feud between the two as the countess writes that Tyrrel is, "always supposing that I should do him wrong."⁹⁰ Cromwell also wrote to Margaret, the dowager-marchioness of Dorset on behalf of a man called Adington who had loaned her husband money. The marchioness refused to repay the money until she had received her late husband's "creation robes of crimson velvet," which Adington had not returned. Although Cromwell was originally asked to help Adington acquire his money, the marchioness trusted his impartiality enough to write, "I would trust, an you did know how I am handled by him, that you would have taken him up somewhat

⁸⁸ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 346-48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

quickly for dealing with me as he doth.”⁹¹ Noblewomen utilized Cromwell’s connections and power to help resolve low-level discord, especially when they were widowed or unmarried and did not have a husband who would employ his own court connections. Cromwell entered into many women’s networks when they needed assistance from court, and in many cases they continued to utilize their connections to him when seeking other kinds of assistance as well.

Noblewomen also turned to Cromwell for help regarding the acquisition of lands or trouble they were having with their rents. In 1534, the countess-dowager of Oxford, Anne de Vere, wrote to Cromwell apologizing for being unable to meet with him while she was in London. She had needed to return home to deal with poachers on her lands for the first time. Lady de Vere noted that she “would have trusted to have had comfort and help of you...specially because I told my lady my mother that you would have caused them, by pain, to have confessed the matter, as my lord chancellor does for her.”⁹² This implies that the two had a close relationship as they were planning a meeting, and because he was known to help her mother as well. Therefore, it is likely that the women of her family had become frequent petitioners within Cromwell’s network. Later that year, the countess-dowager continued her correspondence with Cromwell when she wanted his help acquiring an old monastery to turn into a manor house in case the sweating sickness returned. If he could achieve this for her, then he “shall bind me as you have always done”⁹³ Elizabeth de Vere,

⁹¹ Ibid., 104.

⁹² Ibid., 115.

⁹³ Ibid., 118. 118.

also styled the countess-dowager of Oxford after the death of her husband, was Anne's daughter-in-law, and it was likely due to that connection that Cromwell reached out to her when he wanted to find a good property for his servant to lease. The utilization of networks went both ways in this case—Anne countess-dowager benefitted from Cromwell's influence over the distribution of monastic properties, and he in turn was able to use her connections in an attempt to secure land for one of his servants. However, Elizabeth rejected his proposal because she did not want to displace the tenants who had been living there for years.⁹⁴ The involvement of multiple women from the same family in Cromwell's network demonstrates how these networks expanded to include more women; once one woman was involved she could include her female relatives as well. It also reflects how intertwined these networks could be—familial ties were important in the formation of all connections, even those outside the bonds of family.

More than just this family of women asked Cromwell for help, however. Margaret, the dowager-marchioness of Dorset frequently resided in the abbey of Tiltey in Essex following the death of her husband, and often petitioned Cromwell for favors regarding the maintenance of the abbey.⁹⁵ Lady Anne Skeffington wrote petitioning him for the lease of some of his lands because she was in need of a new manor house.⁹⁶ On a more personal note, his future daughter-in-law Lady Elizabeth Ughtred wrote to Cromwell following the death

⁹⁴ Ibid., 169-70.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 170.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 80.

of her husband but prior to her betrothal to his son Gregory. She was hoping to acquire an abbey, and enclosed the names of several she would be pleased with.⁹⁷

Noblewomen also deployed their connections to Cromwell for the express political benefit of their families. The dowager-marchioness of Dorset wrote over the course of several years, hoping to secure her son's political future. In 1535, she thanked Cromwell for being kind to her son when he was at court and she hoped that, "he from time to time may have your good counsel when you shall see need." This was followed in 1537, when she sent her son to Cromwell with the intention that Cromwell "be a very father to my said son, who of his part shall not have my favor but as he, with his diligent attendance and duty to you, may deserve yours."⁹⁸ By placing her son in the service of Henry's chief minister, she calculated that he would have a greater chance at political success in the future, both by association with power and through the skills he could learn. Lady Catherine Blount also wrote to Cromwell in the hope that he would "be a good master unto my son in this as you have been unto me" by helping secure her son an advanced political position as a knight of Parliament.⁹⁹ One of Prince Edward's nurses, Sybyl Penne utilized her connection to Cromwell to benefit her family. She had received her position in the prince's nursery after Cromwell and her brother-in-law William Sidney intervened with the king. Now, she employed the network she had entered to further the career of her brother-in-law Griffith

⁹⁷ Ibid., 353.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 170, 344.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 168.

Richards “which laboureth to be in service with our young lord and master the prince’s grace.”¹⁰⁰ Noblewomen were able to use their connections to Cromwell to further the political careers of their male relatives in the public sphere that they could not enter.

However, women could utilize this political connection to Cromwell for their own benefit as well, even though they could not maintain official political positions. In the same letter she sent asking for lands, Lady Ughtred explicitly asked to enter into Cromwell’s network. She wrote, “at my last being at the court I desired your lordship that I might be so bold as to be a suitor to you, at which time your lordship gave unto me a very good answer; praying you so to continue my good lord.”¹⁰¹ This request highlights the importance of establishing networks, and how this was done both at court and from afar. As a new widow, Lady Ughtred had the support of her natal kin, the Seymours, but also needed to rely on external connections in order to thrive financially and socially. Lady Ughtred deployed this prearranged network to her benefit, and followed it up by strengthening this connection through marriage into the family. This maneuvering demonstrates how political networks could be used for maximum efficacy.

Noblewomen also entered into Henry VIII’s own network, even when they were not in political crisis, although this is less common because they were not petitioning for offices. The establishment of relationships can be seen in the New Year’s gift rolls, when Henry included separate sections for “Duchesses” and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 354.

“Gentlewomen” and rewarded them with lavish gifts.¹⁰² The earl and countess of Rutland also included detailed notes of what gifts they gave to the king, and the countess would present him with an individual gift, such as “a rolle of camerick and a dossene of handkechers frenged with gold of Venus,” in 1540 the same year she received a gilt ale cup from the King, or an embroidered shirt collar in 1538.¹⁰³ The involvement of women in Henry’s networks is also found in the election of godmothers for his children. Henry chose the dowager-marchioness of Dorset as a godmother for Prince Edward, but she could not attend his baptism because plague had broken out in her town. She wrote to Henry expressing her disappointment with the situation, she did not use this connection to seek favor or a reprieve, but rather to cement her place within his network even from afar.¹⁰⁴

Throughout the course of their lives, noblewomen were able to form and enter many networks. Though they relied heavily on their marital and natal networks, women were not restricted to domestic interactions, and even when they operated within the home they were able to manage finances and lands, which naturally extended their connections outside the family. They were also involved with court life and the utilization of political networks. These ordinary ties between women and other people within different facets of society shows

¹⁰² TNA: E 101/420/4 for the gift roll of 1528; E 101/421/13 for the gift roll for 1534.

¹⁰³ *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland Preserved at Belvoir Castle*, IV, 287, 301.

¹⁰⁴ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 341.

how they used the creation of networks to cut across the boundaries that historians have previously set around noblewomen.

Chapter 2

Women in Crisis: the expansion of networks in times of trouble

Noblewomen's networks became especially important when they were in crisis situations after having their foundational marital or natal networks disrupted. During crises, the financial networks that women had established were not a reliable source of help. Instead, they deployed whatever familial networks were left to them, and utilized their political connections to the court. Although women participated in and contributed to a variety of networks throughout their lives, they were still subject to the patriarchal institutions and expectations held in place by the political systems of Henry VIII's reign. The rupture of traditional familial networks was especially traumatic for women during this period, because they were restricted financially, socially, and politically, when left without the legal security provided by their husbands, male heirs, or male family members. Since it was the men in the household who were allowed direct involvement in the formal political institutions of the court, women had to develop indirect and innovative approaches to building networks. Despite these challenges, noblewomen continued to utilize the networks they had formed, or made new ones, in order to help themselves and their families by wielding indirect political influence.

There were two distinct types of crisis that women found themselves in: the most common were the financial troubles of widowhood, but there were also politically dangerous situations that women needed to navigate as well. These situations prompted the deployment of two networks, their natal family ties and

their political connections to Henry's ministers. However, when familial networks were ruptured by crisis, ladies became increasingly involved in the political networks that radiated from Henry VIII's court. This expansion of their networks occurred in several ways. Women could draw upon the connections their family and friends had already established and have them act as a mediator, which increased their chances of success; they could also approach people who were not part of their inner circles, but who did have ties to individuals in positions of power. In both of these scenarios, noblewomen were drawing upon the links they had already formed to open new relationships. In doing so, the integration into a new network was facilitated by this mutual connection. However, it was also possible, and during Cromwell's tenure as chief minister, probable, that women would begin their correspondence with him without any prior introductions.

Widowhood signaled the disruption of noblewomen's marital networks, which either resulted in increased independence for the widow as she managed her properties and arranged her children's futures, or heralded the arrival of severe financial problems. Widows remained active in the networks that were typical of their daily lives before, except now they had more control over the management of their estates. However, problems arose when they were left with their husbands' debts, or were unable to secure the lands and goods provided for them through their jointures and their husbands' wills. Jointures were the legal provisions specified in a couple's marriage contract that set aside lands and the income from these lands for the wife if she should survive her husband. These

lands would only be held by her for the duration of her life, and then would revert to their heirs. Jointures were designed to provide financial security for widows without allowing any alteration to the patrilineal descent of property through her husband's family.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries this was an almost universal practice and stipulation in marriage contracts. Even Henry established a jointure for Jane Seymour in 1537.¹⁰⁶

Despite this legal assurance, there were disputes over jointures that resulted in the dissolution of the carefully crafted marital networks. Tension often arose between the families of the married pair because the implementation of the jointure also depended on the dowry having been paid in full.¹⁰⁷ After she was widowed, Dorothy Elyot went to the Chancery court to secure her jointure. It was being denied to her because her stepfather Sir Richard Elyot had not finished paying her dowry. He argued that he had only withheld it because her father-in-law had not secured her jointure, but he was ready to pay it as soon as this was remedied.¹⁰⁸ The same thing occurred 1547 when Sir John St. John refused to continue paying his daughter's dowry until her jointure had been securely established.¹⁰⁹ However, this wasn't always an act of explicit retaliation. In 1527, Elizabeth Clere sued her father-in-law because he was withholding her jointure, but in court he explained that this was because her dowry had not been

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: E 315/208a.

¹⁰⁷ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers*, 51.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: C1/405/29.

¹⁰⁹ TNA: C1/1187/5.

paid in full.¹¹⁰ Sir Edmund Denny also withheld half of his daughter's dowry until her jointure had been established.¹¹¹

While widowhood could signal the breakdown of marital networks in some cases, it also reinforced the importance of the longevity of natal networks, as women's immediate family members would often assist in protecting their jointures. Parents were especially concerned with securing their daughter's jointures even while their husbands were still alive. Sir William Gascoigne successfully secured his daughter's jointure by petitioning Cromwell on her behalf after her husband's family had all of their other lands seized for their participation in the Pilgrimage of Grace rebellion.¹¹² Another gentleman left his son-in-law twenty pounds in his will if he would set up her jointure within three months.¹¹³ In 1538, Mary, duchess of Richmond, the seventeen year old widow of Henry's illegitimate son Henry Fitzroy, and her father the duke of Norfolk both petitioned Cromwell to secure her jointure from the king with little success at first. The duke wrote to Cromwell, "her right is clearly good, and that she hath been delayed so long as she thinketh for lack of a good suit made to the king's highness by me." The duchess clearly expected her father to petition on her behalf, suggesting it was normal for fathers to be involved in procuring their daughters' jointures if their fathers-in-law were withholding. When the duchess of Richmond had the chance to "be a suitor with his highness" through the efforts of her father and Cromwell, the king finally allowed her to claim her

¹¹⁰ TNA: C1/490/33.

¹¹¹ TNA: Prob11/19/30.

¹¹² TNA: C1/656/22.

¹¹³ TNA: Prob11/25/29.

jointure.¹¹⁴ Anne Bouchier pardoned the debt her son-in-law owed her in order to ensure that he established her daughter's jointure.¹¹⁵ Cecily, dowager marchioness of Dorset, provided her widowed daughter with an income from her own lands in order to ensure she was properly equipped when her jointure was not provided.¹¹⁶ This assistance also extended to brothers. After Anne Herbert was widowed when she was quite young, she turned to her brother, the Duke of Buckingham, to manage her jointure because it was in a politically unstable area, making it hard to collect the income. She lived with him for two years until she remarried, and during this time he collected her rents for her.¹¹⁷ Rather than struggle through the financial crisis caused by fighting within the marital network alone, women were able to deploy their natal networks in times of strife and uncertainty.

The issue of the allocation of the jointure also caused significant problems between noblewomen and their husbands' heirs necessitating the further use of their political networks as their familial network broke down. When this occurred between widows and their husbands' sons from a previous marriage, it produced another break in the marital networks that had the possibility to dissolve after the death of the patriarch. These relationships became especially strained if the widow had young children to provide for after her husband's death. Her husband's heir was more likely to interfere in the distribution of the

¹¹⁴ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 374-77.

¹¹⁵ TNA: Prob11/19/32.

¹¹⁶ TNA: Prob11/33/14.

¹¹⁷ TNA: E 317/79.

husband's will if they believed their father's other children were draining away the resources that should have gone to them. Lady Jane Calthrop was the second wife of Sir Philip Calthrop and executor of his will. Sir Philip left his wife and their young three children a great deal of his property in addition to her jointure. His son from his first marriage, however, rebelled against having so much of his inheritance allocated to his stepmother and stepsiblings and seized three manors that had been left to his father's second family and their incomes. Cromwell was called upon to settle the dispute and sided with Lady Calthrop, granting her possession of the manors and their revenues for the rest of her life. Cromwell even insisted that her stepson sign a bond to ensure his future compliance.¹¹⁸ Cromwell was also asked to mediate the dispute between the earl of Bath and his stepmother. Since she had benefitted from a hefty jointure, the earl doubted he had the "wherewithal to serve my prince."¹¹⁹ Anne Rede utilized her connections to Henry Gold, the chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury to ask for advice when her stepson would not provide her the entirety of her jointure.¹²⁰ Although it was not uncommon for him to play this role, Cromwell was not at the center of every network women formed with men in power, they established and maintained other political connections that then served them well in times of strife.

In the Court of the Star Chamber, which dealt with cases that included violence, Dame Elizabeth Holford accused her two stepsons of seizing her

¹¹⁸ TNA: SP1/119, ff. 119d-203d.

¹¹⁹ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. XIV Part I, no. 917.

¹²⁰ TNA: SP1/42 f. 150.

jointure and the incomes due to her two young sons, and of robbing her manor house of goods and livestock.¹²¹ Her stepsons retaliated by trying to legally seize her jointure through the Chancery Court.¹²² However, both courts upheld her right to her jointure and her position as executor of her husband's will, and required the men to return her stolen property.¹²³ This matter was resolved entirely through legal courts, rather than with the assistance of connections to the royal court. It was entirely possible to resolve familial disputes this way particularly when there was greater emotional distance between the defendant and the plaintiff. This was also true when Dame Elizabeth Harrington had to resolve a dispute over the allocation of her husband's lands with his brother and heir in the Chancery court.¹²⁴ It certainly was possible, and in some cases necessary, for widows to manage the strife within their martial networks without intervention from their political networks, but the process was often made easier if they had the backing of a politically important figure such as a high ranking religious official or the king's chief minister.

More disruptively to their familial networks, the same disputes focused on the fulfillment of jointures also occurred between widows and their own sons. While cases between widows and their stepsons might be resolved in court, mothers were loathe to take their own sons to court, so these women petitioned Cromwell directly, hoping for his successful intervention in the matter. In the early 1500s, Elizabeth, Lady Tailbois was in a unique position

¹²¹ TNA: Stac 2/21/37.

¹²² TNA: C1/641/38.

¹²³ TNA: Stac 2/21/40.

¹²⁴ TNA: C1/208/71.

because her husband had been declared insane, and Cardinal Wolsey was charged with managing his estates. By 1528, her eldest son Sir Gilbert Tailbois wanted more control over his father's lands and petitioned the king for help. He was married to the mother of Henry's illegitimate son, which gave him significant influence with the king, so his petition was granted easily and he was set to seize control of several more properties. However, Lady Tailbois tried to mitigate the financial losses she would sustain by petitioning in turn to Cardinal Wolsey, whom she had entreated with in his role as administrator of their lands, and she noted, "I have none to make suit nor complain me unto, but only to your good grace."¹²⁵ This illuminates the hard position of women who are involved in disputes within their own families because they have limited resources to use in this situation. Wolsey's intervention seems to have helped, because almost a year later she wrote to his servant asking him to present "six fat oxen" to the cardinal in thanks, and though this issue was still being debated, she noted that Sir Gilbert had not yet taken control of "half of his father's lands."¹²⁶ The rupture in this familial network necessitated a foray into the political sphere because the foundational support network based in the domestic sphere had dissolved. Lady Tailbois deployed her connections at Henry's court in order to ensure that her other children were sufficiently provided for.

This disruption in relations between mothers and eldest sons was not unique to the Tailbois family. Elizabeth, Lady Whethill wrote a series of letters to

¹²⁵ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 42.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

Cromwell in 1538 because “like an unnatural child” her son “keepeth me from my living, and his brethren and sisters in like wise.”¹²⁷ Her entreaty to Cromwell ultimately proved to be a successful use of court connections. He upheld her husband’s will, providing Lady Whethill with her jointure and a disputed property, and made provisions for her younger daughters’ dowries and her younger son’s incomes.¹²⁸ Cromwell’s intervention did not resolve the matter completely. She wrote to Cromwell again about her troubles and the Archbishop of York even petitioned him on her behalf a few months after the initial resolution.¹²⁹ By expanding her network further to include the Archbishop, Lady Whethill was establishing a necessary political support as her immediate familial networks were failing. Margaret, the marchioness dowager of Dorset was similarly confronted with an heir who wanted to seize her jointure as soon as he came of age in 1539. Though it began as a request for the enlargement of his lands that she was willing to grant, it devolved over time until she complained of, “how unkindly and extremely I am handled by my son Marquis, that I cannot be suffered to have mine own stuff out of mine own house” even though “my time cannot be long to keep him from that thing that he ought to have.”¹³⁰ Even as he was seizing her furniture and other belongings, she did not dispute his claim to the lands, only that he was not yet entitled to them while she lived. The relationship between widows and their grown heirs could be fraught with

¹²⁷ TNA: SP1/118 f. 229.

¹²⁸ TNA: SP1/126 ff. 89-102.

¹²⁹ TNA: SP1/133 f. 18 for Lady Whethill’s letter; SP1/142 fol. 178 for the Archbishop of York’s appeal.

¹³⁰ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. VII, no. 153.

tension over the allocation of the lands and incomes that they had to share for the duration of the mother's life just as it was with their marital families who wanted to retain these properties directly. The breakdown of a crucial familial network necessitated outreach to other political networks women had access to and showed how women living outside of the sphere of the court became integrated into the networks spanning outward from London.

Women had to extend their political networks to help their families when they were widowed while their children were still minors. If this happened, then their children technically became wards of the king. This practice occurred because the English nobility held their land as feudal tenants of the crown, and the king had the right to exercise his feudal rights to wardship. Following the death of a noble with underage heirs, the king was granted custody of them and thus had the right to arrange their marriages and receive the revenues from their estates until they were of age. Female heiresses were especially coveted as royal wards because there were not many of them and the crown could extract a high price for selling the wardship to another noble family. Once an heiress's wardship was obtained, the family would either arrange a betrothal between her and their male heir, or sell the wardship again at a profit. Heiresses offered noble families the chance to absorb new, fruitful properties and added income.¹³¹

When Lady Anne Russell was widowed, Cardinal Wolsey purchased her daughter's wardship. She remarried and had a son, but upon the death of that

¹³¹ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 31-32.

son in 1528, she desperately wanted to regain custody of her daughter. She enlisted the assistance of her husband Sir John Russell, and Sir Thomas Henneage a member of Henry's Privy Council to entreat the cardinal to sell her daughter's wardship back to her husband. Her husband wrote to Wolsey stressing his wife's desolation and Sir Henneage wrote to Wolsey that, "if he should not obtain our favor for the wardship of the younger sister, it will be [Lady Anne's] utter undoing."¹³² In the end, Wolsey retained the girl's wardship, despite the close ties the Russells had to the court, which illustrates that political connections did not always ensure success for noblewomen during crisis.¹³³ To prevent a situation like this arising, Dame Anne Rede, again utilizing her connection to Henry Gold, arranged a match for her daughter, who, while not sole heir to her father's estate was co-heir with her stepbrother, to ensure that Dame Rede approved of the arrangement.¹³⁴

If the minor heirs were males, the situation was decidedly more politically complicated for widows to navigate. When their sons became wards of the crown, widows needed royal permission in order to obtain their jointures. While this could be a simple task, the king could make the process more arduous if there was something for the crown to gain financially or politically. Anne, countess of Derby's son, Edward, was only fourteen when his father died, and it took Henry two years before he signed an indenture granting her jointure in

¹³² The National Archives: SP1/100 f. 91d for Sir John Russell's letter; *Letters and Papers*, Vol. IV, no. 4436 for Sir Thomas Henneage's letter.

¹³³ Lady Russell received a New Year's gift from the king that same year as noted in TNA: E 101/420/4.

¹³⁴ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. IV, no. 3029.

1523. During this time, the countess had appealed to the Chancery court and “made suit” directly to the king’s council before she was finally successful. Her jointure was quite large and consisted of lands in various counties all over England valued at 1,074*l.*, 47*s.*, 11*d.* a year, making it financially beneficial for the crown to collect her rents for as long as possible.¹³⁵ While her jointure was being withheld, Dame Maud Parr paid 1,000*l.* to Cardinal Wolsey in 1529 for her son’s wardship and the right to secure his marriage.¹³⁶ While this was a hefty fee, she ended up securing a match between her son and the earl of Essex’s heiress, which elevated the Parr family to the upper nobility when her son William was eventually created the earl of Essex.¹³⁷ Even when confronted with the rupture in familial networks caused by the death of her husband, Dame Parr remained politically active, and was able to extend her political networks to secure an advantageous match for her son, benefitting her whole family—a demonstration of the continued political, social, and financial mobility of widows, even those with the added hurdles of having minor heirs.

Widows could also sell their sons’ wardships, and the right to arrange their marriages, to other nobles. When these agreements turned into disputes, widows turned to their political networks to ensure their families would continue to benefit from the arrangement. When the duke of Norfolk tried to leverage his wardship of Catherine, Lady Blount’s son to get her to repay her debt to his friend earlier than they had previously agreed, she petitioned

¹³⁵ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. III, nos. 2820, 2821, 2822.

¹³⁶ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. IV, no. 5508.

¹³⁷ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. XVIII Part 2, no. 516.

Cromwell for help resolving the issue. She wrote that she had, “no penny of profit by the wardship of my son” because she had to pay the duke one hundred pounds “to the intent I would marry my son to his comfort,” and therefore could not repay her debt earlier. Cromwell likely did help Lady Blount because some time after this, she utilized Cromwell’s networks to purchase abbey lands for two of her young sons. Margaret, dowager-marchioness of Dorset began having problems managing finances for her son even before their dispute when he came of age. The duke of Suffolk proposed a match between her son and his daughter with the king’s sister Mary. The dowager-marchioness agreed on the condition that the duke take her son on as a ward and provide for him financially during his minority. When the duke delayed paying, harsh correspondence followed as the duke called her an unnatural mother. Due to the close relationship between the duke and the king, the marchioness’s petition to Cromwell was crucial. In exchange for a gilt pot, ten pounds, and the promise of a small portion of her revenues, she wanted to ensure that, “if my lord of Suffolk do make any suit of means unto the king’s highness, or to you, or any of his council, against me in this behalf, then I beseech you that it may please you to make answer for me unto the king’s highness.”¹³⁸ In her anticipation that their deal might turn out for the worst, the marchioness utilized her own political connections to try to counter the duke’s influence at court. The establishment and utilization of political networks at court was crucial for widows whose sons were the wards of

¹³⁸ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 102-03.

powerful noblemen because these women needed someone else who occupied a political position to back their claims.

Widows who faced financial difficulties because of debts their families incurred also turned to Cromwell. Margaret, dowager-marchioness of Dorset's correspondence with Cromwell dated back to 1531, the year after her husband's death. Though she had obtained control all of her husband's lands from the king, she incurred financial troubles after paying a hefty fee to extricate her son from an undesirable marriage contract. She petitioned Cromwell to have some of her payments to the earl of Arundel for the broken betrothal delayed because, "without your loving help, as to be a mean to the king's grace, that motion may be made to the said earl...I shall not be able to set forth my poor daughters in marriage, neither continue the keeping of my poor house." This was at the beginning of the dowager-marchioness and Cromwell's prolific relationship, but they had already cemented a connection as evidenced by her desire that he, "not be weary of my continual requests made and hereafter to be made unto you."¹³⁹ Anne, Lady Conyers became integrated into Cromwell's network following the death of her husband when her brother William Lord Dacre wrote to Cromwell asking him to grant her petition. Although Lady Conyers had utilized her personal connections and "borrowed amongst our poor friends," it was not enough when the, "daily sundry of creditors of my said lord my husband calls upon me for such debts as he was indebted unto them, the which I shall never be

¹³⁹ Ibid., 106-09.

able to pay.”¹⁴⁰ In 1536, Dame Anne Skeffington was also left in debt when her husband, who had been the lord deputy of Ireland, died. Dame Skeffington first wrote to Queen Anne, asking her to intercede with Cromwell on her behalf because her husband’s death had left her and her children “utterly undone.”¹⁴¹ This was followed with a letter to Cromwell, that detailed the destitution and debt Dame Skeffington was in. She petitioned that he might persist in being, “a good master and a mediator for me unto his grace...in recompense of some part of my late husband’s good service.”¹⁴² In all three of these situations, the ladies already had some connection or means by which to enter into Cromwell’s network before they asked him for financial assistance.

Even for those widows not already in crisis situations, some made a point of reaching out to Cromwell in order to ensure they would have a network to fall back on if they ever found themselves in need. Margaret, Lady Coffin, wrote to Cromwell following her husband’s death, aware of the possibility that she would need his intervention, beseeching, “his grace to be a good and gracious lord to me in all my causes; for I know not what case I and my servants stand in.”¹⁴³ In 1540, Lettice, Lady Lee wrote to Cromwell expressing the “trouble, care, and heaviness” of widowhood. She called upon him to continue the relationship he had developed with her family before her husband’s death, writing that “now I shall humbly beseech your lordship to continue good lord unto me, and to give

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-03.

¹⁴¹ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. X, nos. 185, 186.

¹⁴² The National Archives: SP60/3 f. 9.

¹⁴³ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 63.

me liberty, that if any wrongs be laid to me, that I may be so bold to come or send your lordship for aid, and to help me in my right at all times, in the way of charity, as a poor and desolate widow.” In exchange she made Cromwell master of the game at Beyrdesthorne and sent him money to buy a horse for hunting.¹⁴⁴ These widows hoped to secure themselves in Cromwell’s network in order to preemptively curtail any financial, political, or legal woes that might follow now that they were in the tenuous position of widowhood.

Noblewomen also deployed their connections to the court in times of serious political crisis for their families. When nobles were accused of treason Henry would compel Parliament to pass an act of attainder, which legally forfeited all of the accused’s lands and titles to the crown, and prevented their heirs from inheriting any lands or incomes. This left their families destitute, a situation widows had to navigate on their own. Lady Carew’s utilization of her political and familial networks following her husband’s execution highlights the difficulties faced by women widowed by treason, but also how they were able to mobilize to their own benefit. In 1539, Sir Nicholas Carew was attainted for his part in the Exeter Conspiracy, a plot designed to depose Henry and place his catholic cousin the first Marquis of Exeter on the throne instead.¹⁴⁵ After this, Lady Carew was left with four children who had inherited nothing and only twenty pounds. She began petitioning Cromwell for the restoration of some of her husband’s lands at Bletchingly, Wallington, and in Sussex. She emphasized the hardships of widows of treason because if her husband, “had not offended

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁴⁵ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. XIV Part 1, no. 290.

the king's grace and his laws, I should have had an honest living, which should have had a third part of his lands, but now I cannot claim that, by reason that he is attainted."¹⁴⁶ Cromwell did respond to her petition, and sent her 32*l* although he had not yet procured lands for her. Lady Carew wanted him to secure her lands in Beltchingly because there was "a very fair house upon it," while the manor she lived in at the time was in need of repair.¹⁴⁷

While Lady Carew was able to utilize the political network available to her, she also relied on her familial networks for help. Her mother, Margaret Lady Bryan, was Prince Edward's chief governess and therefore had strong connections to the royal court. After Lady Carew informed her mother that Cromwell had secured her lands in Sussex, Lady Bryan wrote thanking him for his "kindness to my poor daughter Carow." She then continued to advocate on behalf of her daughter, again pushing Cromwell to secure Bletchingly for her because, "it would comfort her poor children to have these two to her and her heirs male."¹⁴⁸ Lady Carew received added support from her mother-in-law Maude Carew who wrote to Cromwell later that year thanking him for the help in redressing Lady Carew's "great late losses," and hopes he will continue to work, "to the comfort of all poor widows."¹⁴⁹ It is significant that she deployed her female family members following the scandal of treason, because women

¹⁴⁶ TNA: SP1/44 f. 87.

¹⁴⁷ TNA: SP1/242 f. 222.

¹⁴⁸ TNA: SP1/156 f. 118.

¹⁴⁹ TNA: SP1/155 f. 9.

were more likely to be viewed sympathetically in cases of treason.¹⁵⁰ Through the mobilization of both her natal and marital networks, Lady Carew demonstrated the capability of female centered networks to provide political support.

The use of political networks could also serve as a means for noblewomen to circumvent their familial networks, rather than a way to bolster them. In 1530, Elizabeth the countess of Kildare wrote directly to Henry in order to secure an inheritance for her son against her husband's will. The countess was the second wife of the lord-deputy of Ireland, and his children from his first marriage were much better provided for in his will than was her son. She was related to the king through his grandmother Elizabeth Woodville, and utilized this distant blood relationship to her benefit when she wrote that her petition should be advanced because her son was, "of your most royal blood." The countess wanted Henry to provide her son with rich lands so that, "he may hereafter be the more able to do you noble service in this your land of Ireland."¹⁵¹ Her brother, Lord Leonard Grey wrote to Cromwell on the same issue. He stipulated that, "my sister Kildare would have you labor this as secretly as you can, because my lord her husband should not know of her suit, for she supposeth he would be more gladder to get these manors unto his eldest son

¹⁵⁰ In an earlier trial, the marquis of Exeter's wife Gertrude, marchioness of Exeter was pardoned for treason even though she had been denouncing Henry and supported Catholic sentiments against the crown. This can be found: TNA: SP1/80 f. 116.

¹⁵¹ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 61-63.

than unto this son that he hath by my sister, and this is the cause to have it secretly labored.”¹⁵² The necessity of bypassing her marital family and relying instead on her natal family and political connections to further her son’s prospects shows how noblewomen were able to maneuver through their networks depending on what was most beneficial to their suit.

In 1535, Mary Boleyn, the sister of Queen Anne, went against the wishes of her family when she married William Stafford, a man below her station. She utilized her connection to Cromwell in the hopes that he would intercede with them on her behalf. Cromwell’s intervention was necessary in this situation because Lady Stafford had incurred the wrath of her natal family for wasting the political potential of her marriage. However it was the king and queen that she was most worried about, so she petitioned Cromwell to, “sue for us to the king’s highness, and beseech his highness, which ever was wont to take pity, to have pity on us...for so far as I can perceive, her grace is so highly displeased with us both that, without the king be so good lord to us as to withdraw his rigor and sue for us, we are never like to recover her grace’s favor.”¹⁵³ Lady Stafford had to deploy her political networks when her natal family had turned on her, but this was an especially tense situation because her natal family was inextricably linked to the politics of the court.

Political connections to the court became crucial for noblewomen who had lost the support of their natal and marital networks. A prime example of this

¹⁵² TNA: SP60/2 f. 3.

¹⁵³ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 193-95.

was Elizabeth Howard, duchess of Norfolk. In 1513, after the death of the duke of Norfolk's first wife, he married the fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Stafford, daughter of the duke of Buckingham. Although Elizabeth wrote that "my lord father had bought my lord of Westmoreland for me; he and I had loved together for two years," when the duke "came thither at Shrovetide, he would have none of my sisters, but only me," for a wife.¹⁵⁴ As her father was loath to let such a political opportunity pass his family by, her previous betrothal was broken. From these inauspicious beginnings, an ultimately disastrous marriage was born.

Though they passed eleven years in seeming peace, by 1527 their marriage had fallen apart due to the duke's infidelity and Elizabeth's ties to her marital family began to disintegrate. Though her connection to the Boleyns as Anne's aunt, Henry's annulment from Catherine of Aragon, and marriage to Anne Boleyn should have been desirable for the duchess. However, she remained staunchly loyal to Catherine over the years. From 1530 on, she sent her gifts of poultry and oranges, and wrote to her often.¹⁵⁵ Even when her marital family tried to convince her to cease her support for the fallen queen, she announced that even, "if all the world were to try it" she would remain faithful.¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth also kept Catherine informed about the state of Anne's relationship with Henry, information that the Spanish ambassador Eustace Chapuys relayed to Charles V.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹⁵⁵ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. IV, no. 6738.

¹⁵⁶ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. V, no. 70.

She wrote that the queen's opponents were "at their wits end, being further off from their object than the day they began."¹⁵⁷

The duchess had a very low opinion of Anne and did not attempt to keep her feelings hidden, publically calling her, "the ruin of all her family," and she reported that Henry was "in marvelous sorrow and tribulation" because of Anne.¹⁵⁸ When Anne arranged a marriage between the king's illegitimate son the duke of Richmond and Elizabeth's daughter Mary Howard, Elizabeth was vehemently opposed to this match. Rather, she wanted her daughter to marry the early of Derby, "but the Lady Anne opposed it, and used such high words towards the Duchess that the latter narrowly escaped being dismissed from court."¹⁵⁹ Her actions were deliberately opposed to the political success of her marital family, and in 1531, Elizabeth was dismissed from court at Anne's request, "owing to her speaking too freely, and having declared in favor of the Queen much more openly than these people like her to do."¹⁶⁰

Despite her removal from court, Elizabeth was still expected to be publically part of the familial network of the Boleyns and Howards. According to the Venetian ambassador, Elizabeth accompanied Anne and Henry to France in 1532, despite her initial refusal because, "many persons are of the opinion that

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 216.

¹⁵⁹ *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, ed. Pascual de Gayangos, vol. IV (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1879), no. 460.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 720.

on the other side of the channel, his Majesty will marry said Madam Anne.”¹⁶¹ To add further scandal to the situation, observers especially noted Elizabeth’s absence from Anne’s coronation as her refusal to attend stemmed “from the love she bore to the previous Queen, although she was Anne’s aunt.”¹⁶²

While she had effectively ruined any familial goodwill that she might have received from her marital family, Elizabeth’s marriage to the duke was also in a worse state than before. The enmity between the couple was so obvious that even Chapuys commented upon it when her brother-in-law Thomas Burgoyne was sent to, “arrange matters between her and her husband, the Duke, whom she would not see or listen to on account of his being love with a maid of honor to the Royal concubine (Anne Boleyn).”¹⁶³ Even her natal family tried to induce reconciliation between the two—a proposal Elizabeth vehemently rejected to a degree that she began to break her connections to her kin. Eventually relations between them had devolved so much that Cromwell had to intervene. He initially hoped that her brother Henry Stafford would accept her into his home, but she could no longer rely on her natal networks either. Rather, her brother wrote, “the redress of this standeth not in the advertisement of her kin, whereof she hath had sundry times great plenty near,” instead of helping, allowing her into his home would be detrimental to his family because, “her wild language might undo me and all mine.” He finished his refusal by announcing, “if I had not found

¹⁶¹ *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, ed. Rawdon Brown, vol. IV (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1871), no. 802.

¹⁶² *Letters and Papers*, Vol. VI, no. 585.

¹⁶³ *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, IV, Vol. IV, no. 1130.

you my especial good friend, I would never have opened my mind so far, which is my shame and sorrow, being her brother, to rehearse.”¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, as a result of her very public dispute with her powerful husband, her other networks established through friendship were also in disarray as she noted, “many of my friends that sent me venison last year, dare not send me none this year for my lord’s displeasure.”¹⁶⁵ Even as her friends and family urged her to reconcile with her husband, she refused, “seeing that I will not do it at the king’s commandment, nor at your desire, I will not do it for no friend nor kin I have living.”¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth rejected any compromise on the basis of social reparation within her networks; rather she was willing to let them dissolve in order to ensure a separation from her husband.

Due to her refusal to comply with either her natal or her marital networks, Elizabeth’s only option was to turn to Cromwell for financial support when she desperately needed it. She lived in Hertfordshire, on harsh land, and she wrote hoping for his intervention with the king, “to get me a better living,” because she had only 50*l.* and received only 300 marks a year. As time went on, they continued this correspondence, as she desired her jointure of 500 marks a year to sustain her and needed Cromwell’s help getting it. After Cromwell successfully secured her daughter the duchess of Richmond’s jointure, she hoped to receive hers as well, “that I might have a better living, by your good means,

¹⁶⁴ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 219.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

that I might live on my jointure."¹⁶⁷ Cromwell was able to secure her a greater income through grants from the king. However, despite her repeated petitions to Cromwell from 1535 until his death in 1540, her overall fortune in life improved little because she still remained estranged from her familial networks. Even Cromwell's intervention could not fix her situation because it was not enough to only have a political connection to the court without any other networks to bolster her in her time of need. Through this all she remained adamant that she would not reconcile with her husband or allow him to "rule" her again. Instead, she remained in Hertfordshire where she had been living the past five years. Even after her husband proposed for the second time that she live with her brother, she refused, throwing the duke's words back at him, "seeing that my lord my husband reckoned me to be so unreasonable, it were better that I kept me away, and keep my own house still, and trouble no other body, as I am sure I should so."¹⁶⁸

The only person left with whom Elizabeth remained open to and who took an active interest in her was the earl of Westmoreland, her old betrothed. She wrote to him in 1540, "in my most loving wise...I desire you, my lord, to make no more suit to my lord my husband, for there shall no prisonment make me to lie on myself: I have been so well used to it this seven years that I care not for it."¹⁶⁹ Though he was clearly intent on helping her, she had resigned herself to the solitude of a life without the support of the typical networks of a

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 369.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 99.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 163.

noblewoman of her day. The duchess was not a typical Tudor woman in this sense, because while most women took part in a vast array of robust networks, Elizabeth had been isolated from both of her traditional familial networks, and even the networks she had formed at court could offer her little relief.

Chapter 3

Margaret Tudor: the networks of an English princess and a Scottish queen

Margaret Tudor was an English princess and then a Scottish queen, and through both of these periods in her life, the development and maintenance of political and social networks was crucial. She had to maintain her kinship ties from a different kingdom, she created numerous political connections by integrating herself into the flow of information between the countries, and she struggled through two different marital networks in order to see her son safely to the Scottish throne. Margaret's deployment of networks has much in common with the way noble English women utilized them, but the consequences of her actions within them had had a greater impact on the development of the relationship between two largely hostile kingdoms.

As the second child and eldest daughter of the founders of the Tudor dynasty, Henry Tudor and Elizabeth of York, Margaret Tudor was surrounded by the royal trappings of the court from the moment of her birth on November 28th, 1489. Two days later at Westminster, the Bishop of Ely baptized her while she was attended to by her godparents the Archbishop of Canterbury, the duchess of Norfolk, and the countess of Richmond, who was also her paternal grandmother and namesake. Following her baptism, she was presented with gifts like of golden cups and silver chests from her godparents and the dozens of noble men

and women who had also attended the ceremony.¹⁷⁰ From birth, networks were being established around Margaret. Her godparents and the gift givers would all form part of her early ties within the court.

It wasn't just her successful birth that was being celebrated, but also her political significance. With the royal succession already established in her four-year-old brother Arthur, Margaret's importance to England lay in her marriage prospects. Henry VII had rushed to hold her baptism two days after her birth on St. Andrew's day—the day of celebration for Scotland's patron saint.¹⁷¹ This date linked Margaret to Scotland from birth, and was an early indicator of Henry VII's desire to create an alliance between the two kingdoms. The culmination of this desire occurred thirteen years later with Margaret's entrance into Scotland as that kingdom's queen. Even as a two day old infant, Margaret was placed at the center of a hoped for marital network. Her central political importance lay in how she would be able to connect the English and Scottish royal families for their political benefit.

Following her birth, Margaret joined Arthur as they travelled between their own households at Sheen, Eltham, Windsor, and Westminster. Despite the infrequency with which she saw her parents, Margaret developed a bond with her father that endured even when she travelled to Scotland. When she first arrived, she wrote him that she wished, "I were with your Grace now, and many

¹⁷⁰ John Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, ed. Thomas Hearne, vol. IV (London 1774), 254.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

times more.”¹⁷² Two younger siblings, Henry and Mary, joined Margaret and Arthur in the next few years. Margaret developed strong connections to her siblings throughout her childhood as she first shared a nursery with Arthur and then with her two younger siblings when Arthur received his own household. They also developed relationships with their nurses that lasted until adulthood. Lady Jane Guildford, one of the princesses’ childhood nurses, received an annuity of 20*l.* in 1514, “for her services to the late King and Queen, and to Mary queen of the French and Margaret queen of Scots,” and another 40*l.* for the same reason a year later.¹⁷³ Margaret also recommended her old nurse Alice Davy to be a gentlewoman for Catherine of Aragon, and in 1519, she was also granted an annuity of 10*l.*¹⁷⁴ This case shows how Margaret formed connection within her royal household that persisted for years, and how she fostered the formation of new ties through introductions.

As their family grew and Margaret grew older, she began to appear publicly as a member of the royal family. At age five she made her first ceremonial appearance on All Hallows Eve, 1494 to celebrate the installation of the three-year-old Henry as Duke of York and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. It was at the end of the joust that Margaret first stepped into her role as princess and presented Sir John Peach with a ruby ring to commemorate his victory.¹⁷⁵ From

¹⁷² Henry Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, VI vols., vol. I (London: R. Bentley, 1846), 42.

¹⁷³ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. I, no. 59 for the grant in 1514; *Ibid.*, Vol. II, no. 569 for the grant in 1515.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, no. 8.

¹⁷⁵ Nancy Lenz Harvey, *The Rose and the Thorn: The Lives of Mary and Margaret Tudor* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 6-7.

an early age, Margaret was fully engaged in the pageantry of the Tudor family at court. Though she was not yet part of the network of court, she was already being used to bolster the strength of her family's political ties through demonstrations of wealth and power. Even though she was so young, Margaret was exposed to how social and political linkages were cemented at court through the interactions fostered at gatherings such as the joust, and through the exchange of valuables.

Perkin Warbeck's rebellion against Henry VII was soon to dictate the course of Margaret's future. Warbeck claimed to be Richard of York, the younger of the two York princes killed in the Tower of London during the reign of Richard III. Intermittently from 1491 to 1499, Warbeck's rebellion plagued the Tudor throne especially as it received support from Scotland, Ireland and France. In Scotland, James IV's support for Warbeck became especially problematic for Henry VII. In addition to supporting him financially and militarily, he had allowed his cousin Lady Katherine Gordon to marry Warbeck, thereby connecting him to the Scottish crown and adding to his legitimacy. To combat this, Henry first proposed a marriage between Margaret and James in 1495, but this was rebuffed when Scotland tried to invade England a month later.¹⁷⁶ Warbeck was captured and brought to London a year later where he was imprisoned until his execution in 1499. That same year, when she was nine years old, Margaret and James's betrothal was secured.¹⁷⁷ Henry wanted to

¹⁷⁶ *Rymer's Foedera*, ed. Thomas Rymer, vol. XII(London: Apud Joannem Neulme, 1739-1745), 569-77.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 721-36.

establish peace in England in his remaining years as king, and he believed that establishing Margaret within the political networks of both England and Scotland was sufficient to prevent hostilities between the two kingdoms.¹⁷⁸

For noble families, marriage contracts were a crucial part of expanding familial links throughout society; this was true of royal marriages as well, except that this expansion would have farther-reaching consequences across both realms. Margaret knew the importance of political alliances, and would have understood the value of including the Scottish king in the English royal family's network. While royal marriages were meant to serve the same primary functions that marriages among noble families did, in that they were designed for political, financial, and social advancement, a marriage between two kingdoms also created an additional intermediary link. The wife would have close ties to both and would hopefully be able to influence her husband to act beneficially towards her natal kingdom.

Thus began the process of arranging the details of the marriage contract. The pair needed a papal dispensation to marry because they shared a great-grandmother, but the Pope granted it easily enough after Margaret wrote to him.¹⁷⁹ Royal marriages often necessitated the deployment of other political networks even before they began, as evidenced by this communication. Margaret was already beginning to navigate the political networks that existed between

¹⁷⁸ Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle: Containing the History of England, During the Reign of Henry the Fourth, and the Succeeding Monarchs, to the End of the Reign of Henry the Eighth, in Which Are Particularly Described the Manners and Customs of Those Periods*(London Printed for J. Johnson 1809), 493.

¹⁷⁹ *Rymer's Foedera*, XII, 765-70.

the major European powers, and how they had their own systems of favor and exchange. It was finally decided that they would be married in a proxy wedding in January 1502, but Margaret would remain in England for another year until she reached puberty. The use of a proxy again shows how many people had to be deployed in the arrangement of a royal marriage. After this, the final negotiations took place between Henry and James over Margaret's dowry and jointure. Henry agreed to pay 30,000 gold nobles over the course of three years, while James took responsibility for paying for all of her needs once she arrived in Scotland and agreed to pay the salaries of her English ladies.¹⁸⁰

With this all arranged James sent ambassadors to England to conduct the proxy wedding. The Bishop of Glasgow, the Bishop of Moray, and Patrick, earl of Bothwell, led the embassy. The ceremony took place on January 25th 1502, at Richmond Palace with the earl acting as the proxy bridegroom. In attendance were six "lords spiritual of the realm" including Margaret's godfather the Archbishop of Canterbury, 20 "lords temporal," 28 knights, and 19 ladies, including her godmother the duchess of Norfolk and her childhood nurse Lady Guildford.¹⁸¹ This continued tie to her childhood nurse shows how these connections had longevity and were reaffirmed during important occasions. What followed was an elaborate celebration that included feasts, jousting, and a masque. During this time, Margaret did not have the opportunity to develop any

¹⁸⁰ Hester W. Chapman, *The Sisters of Henry VIII: Margaret Tudor, Queen of Scotland (November 1489-October 1541), Mary Tudor, Queen of France and Duchess of Suffolk (March 1496-June 1533)* (London: Capa, 1969), 28.

¹⁸¹ Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, IV, 258-60.

kind of relationship with the Scottish ambassadors because they spent their time in the company of the king, while Margaret remained with her mother and the other ladies of the court who advised her to give “praise and thankings” to the men who performed well in the joust.¹⁸² Despite this lack of interaction with the Scots, Margaret was continuing to create and strengthen networks at the English court.

The Anglo-Scottish peace was important to England for a myriad of reasons, but the possibility of breaking the Franco-Scottish alliance was a significant factor. Scotland and France had formed what became known as the “Auld Alliance” with the ratification of a defensive peace treaty in 1296. Scotland managed to resist annexation by England throughout the fifteenth century, and every Scottish king renewed Scotland’s treaty with France.¹⁸³ Therefore, Margaret’s marriage to James was an important political step by the English in their attempt to break the bond between Scotland and France.

Margaret’s last year in England was marred by tragedy following the deaths of her brother Arthur and her mother, but plans for her marriage continued unimpeded. She started her long journey northward on June 27th, 1503. Margaret’s trip through England serves as a map of the networks between the crown and the nobility because she stopped frequently to engage with members of the nobility and gentry. The king accompanied her until they reached Collyweston on July 8th. There, she said formal farewells to both him and

¹⁸² Ibid., 262-63.

¹⁸³ Richard Glen Eaves, *Henry VIII's Scottish Diplomacy, 1513-1524: England's Relations with the Regency Government of James V* (New York: Exposition Press, 1971), 23.

her grandmother, and was placed in the care of the Earl of Surrey and his wife the countess for the remainder of the journey. Following this departure, Margaret's progress to Scotland continued to be a slow and ostentatious affair. An ever-changing retinue of lords, ladies, knights, and gentlewomen accompanied her, "some farther than others, as they were ordered by the king." Though the account of her journey does not make note of many particular interactions Margaret had or with whom she spent her time, she was certainly attended upon by Lady Guildford, Lady Vernell, Lady Stanley, Lady Neville, the Viscountess Lisle, and the countess of Surrey for the entire trip, and once they entered Scotland the Ladies Barwick and Morton entered her retinue.¹⁸⁴ This journey would have been a time ripe for establishing new relationships, especially with her ladies.

Margaret was also in constant contact with other members of her retinue. She seems to have developed a close relationship with her Master of the Horse Thomas Wortley who rode just behind her in the procession.¹⁸⁵ In the same letter to her father that expressed her homesickness, Margaret beseeched him to "be a good and gracious lord to Thomas," because in addition to his hard work, he had a "good and true mind." She had nothing to "recompense him, excepted the favor of your Grace."¹⁸⁶ That the creation of this link was reinforced with the explicit exchange of favor shows that Margaret was by this point an active participant in the formation and maintenance of social networks. It was during

¹⁸⁴ Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, IV, 266, 74, 80-81, 86, 93.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 265-66.

¹⁸⁶ Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, I, 42. 42.

this long procession that she would also have had the chance to interact with the earl of Surrey and Lord Dacre for the first time in an official capacity.¹⁸⁷ Once installed on the Scottish throne, Margaret was to have extensive correspondence with these two men, and she formed a crucial part of their political networks. This journey formed the initial basis for what would become long and complicated relationships.

On August 3rd, at the Castle of Dalkeith, Margaret first made the acquaintance of her husband, the king of Scotland. They spent the next few days surrounded by courtiers amidst feasts, dances, and games. James staged a joust to take place in the middle of their journey to Edinburgh, and later released a tame doe to be chased by a greyhound for the amusement of the crowd of courtiers riding with them. Finally, on August 8th, The Archbishop of Glasgow presided over their marriage and Margaret's coronation. In attendance were many Scottish lords and "ladies of great name," who Margaret was introduced to by the Bishop of Moray following the ceremony. The countess of Surrey bore her train, and she was accompanied by "her ladies richly arrayed," most prominently Lady Stanley, Lady Neville, Lady Lisle, and Lady Guildford. This was followed by a long evening of feasting and dancing for all of the nobles in attendance.¹⁸⁸

Following this, Margaret remained closely attended by her own ladies and a new retinue of Scottish ladies who had been appointed by the king. Throughout the experience, the countess of Surrey was a particularly steadfast companion. They spent much time together, dancing following the banquets or

¹⁸⁷ Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, IV, 278.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 288-94.

in Margaret's private chamber, and playing cards together. The countess was also seated next to her at every banquet they attended.¹⁸⁹ Throughout this long journey, Margaret formed a close friendship with the countess. This was an important social tie because Margaret was isolated from her family and entering a new country for the first time, while politically the countess of Surrey was an important woman with a powerful husband. Their relationship is especially notable, because from the beginning Margaret did not like the earl of Surrey, a relationship that would not improve much. While she was having a difficult time adjusting to life in Scotland, and was being overlooked by both the Scottish and English noblemen, a female companion would have been a great comfort. Though the countess did not remain in Scotland, and was instead active in the English court, their paths did intertwine again in 1517 when they were reunited in London.¹⁹⁰

For the final six years of his reign, Henry VII's plan for peace between England and Scotland proved to be successful. These years weren't completely conflict-free; there were still continual border raids by each country, but James was swifter to punish the Scottish perpetrators, and there was no threat of war. However, relations between the countries took a turn for the worse following the death of Henry VII in 1509. Henry VIII married Catherine of Aragon weeks later, and ascended the throne on June 24th.¹⁹¹ Initially, Scotland and England

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 283, 87-88, 99.

¹⁹⁰ The countess was present for the baptisms of Henry and Catherine's first son: *Letters and Papers*, Vol. I, no 670; and for the Princess Mary's: Ibid., Vol. II, no. 1573. She was present at the court in 1517: Ibid., Vol. II, no. 3446.

¹⁹¹ Harvey, *The Rose and the Thorn: The Lives of Mary and Margaret Tudor*, 46.

maintained peace and Henry VIII and James renewed the treaty established by Henry VII. The pope sanctioned their treaty, and if either king broke it he was to be excommunicated.¹⁹² The truce began to fracture within the next few years over naval issues and Henry's failure to deliver the jewels Margaret had been left in their father's will. By 1513, Margaret was still requesting her jewels from the English ambassador Dr. West, to no avail—Henry was withholding the jewels because he didn't want to give James any English resources in case of war between the kingdoms. Circumventing the network of communication set in place by Dr. West, Margaret wrote to her brother trying to appeal directly to him. She lamented, "we cannot believe that of your mind or of your command we are so unfriendly dealt with in your father's legacy," and said she was, "ashamed therewith."¹⁹³ When the situation became too tense, however, she was willing to intervene for England, "without further communication of her legacy."¹⁹⁴

During this time, Margaret had her first child—a son—in 1507 when she was seventeen. He was christened James, and his godparents were the Bishop of Glasgow, Patrick, earl of Bothwell, and the Countess of Huntley, although Margaret participated in none of the celebrations surrounding his birth because she was incredibly ill. The child died only a year later. This was to mark a pattern in Margaret's life in the years leading up to her husband's death in 1513; she spent the majority of the time either pregnant or recovering from illness that following the birth. Almost all of her children died in infancy—none lived longer

¹⁹² Eaves, *Henry VIII's Scottish Diplomacy, 1513-1524: England's Relations with the Regency Government of James V*, 27.

¹⁹³ Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, I, 64-65.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

than a year until the future James V was born on April 10th, 1512.¹⁹⁵ This was to have dire consequences as England and Scotland prepared for war, because if James IV died, it would leave Scotland under the rule of an infant king. While an heir would benefit the kingdom because it would prevent any of the rival nobles from trying to claim the throne for themselves, it also meant over a decade of the power struggles created by a regency.

No record Margaret's household during this period remains, and it is not known which ladies attended her, nor who was present in any of her birthing chambers. Although Scottish ladies attended her, it is also probable that she had English gentlewomen in attendance, because that was a stipulation in her marriage contract.¹⁹⁶ During this time, she maintained her political connections with the English court. She was in communication with the English ambassadors, Dr. West and the Bishop of Ely, and maintained correspondence with her brother and Catherine of Aragon. Margaret spent time with Dr. West and Sir John Sinclair at Linlithgow Castle where she was residing with her infant son, and she would send tokens to Henry, Catherine, and the Princess Mary.¹⁹⁷ She was integrated into the web of politics and the flow of information between Scotland and England, and was still an active participant in her natal network. The Kings of Denmark and Spain also approached her as an intermediary; they both wanted her to speak to James on their behalves.¹⁹⁸ Wives often operated in this capacity,

¹⁹⁵ Harvey, *The Rose and the Thorn: The Lives of Mary and Margaret Tudor*, 36-37.

¹⁹⁶ *Rymer's Foedera*, XII, 785-804.

¹⁹⁷ Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, I, 73.

¹⁹⁸ For Margaret's letter to John, King of Denmark letter: *Letters and Papers*, Vol. I, no. 518; for Margaret's letter to Ferdinand of Aragon: *Ibid.*, no. 1109.

and it was no different for a queen. The only difference was that Margaret was involved in high stakes political machinations.

Margaret's years as James IV's queen were not easy ones, despite the degree of affection they seemed to share, but she was acutely aware how dire her position in Scotland would become if James died leaving only an infant as heir to the throne. For this reason, and because Margaret genuinely desired a peace between her home country and the country she lived in as queen, she tried desperately to maintain peace between her husband and her brother—though her efforts ultimately proved fruitless. Dr. West wrote to Henry that Margaret had tried to intervene with her husband and, "she had done the best that was in her power, and so would continue."¹⁹⁹ Despite this, neither Henry nor James was willing to back down once the threat of war was clear.

On September 9th 1513, the Scots met the English in battle at Flodden Hill. By the end of the day, James and most of the prominent nobility were dead along with 10,000 other Scotsmen. This battle concluded, the war with England ended. The Scots forces were too depleted to try another invasion and the English troops were faced with a shortage of supplies and bad weather that prevented them from solidifying their victory with further invasion of Scotland. Furthermore, Henry no longer saw Scotland as the threat it had once been because with James and many nobles dead in battle, and Margaret as regent, England had a better chance of exerting control in Scotland through peace.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, I, 74.

²⁰⁰ Eaves, *Henry VIII's Scottish Diplomacy, 1513-1524: England's Relations with the Regency Government of James V*, 31-32.

With the country still in mourning, the Scottish Parliament—senior clergymen and the young heirs of nobles who had died at Flodden now made up the majority—was called at Perth in early October to sort out the affairs of state. James V's coronation was held at Scone, but crowning an infant king was not a joyful occasion. In accordance with James IV's will, Margaret was to be regent as long as she remained a widow, although handing the government over to a woman, even in regency, was contrary to the customs of Scotland. Due to this, provisions were made regarding her regency in James's will. The earl of Bothwick took custody of James and the castle of Stirling where the infant king lived, and Margaret was assigned the Archbishop of Glasgow, and the Earls of Huntly, Arran and Angus as counselors to help her rule.²⁰¹ A general council of 18 clergymen and 15 noblemen was also assembled to oversee the daily matters of the realm, but the council was supposed to act, "as it likes the queen to command."²⁰² Margaret was operating at the center of a vast network that encompassed Scottish politics at this time through her connections to all of these men whom she had to work with.

Even so, from the beginning there were nobles who thought a woman was unfit to rule Scotland, and the Duke of Albany was contacted by those who wanted him to assume the regency. John Stewart, the Duke of Albany, was next in line to the Scottish throne after James but spent his whole life in France where

²⁰¹ John Leslie, *The Historie of Scotland*, vol. V (Edinburgh and London Printed for the Society by W. Blackwood and Sons, 1888), 148.

²⁰² Robert Kerr Hannay, *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs, 1501-1554: Selections from the Acta Dominorum Concilii; Introductory to the Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1932), 1.

his father, James IV's uncle, had been sent to live in exile.²⁰³ Albany therefore represented an alternative not just to a woman regent, but an English woman. While Margaret's involvement in the English court could be beneficial to Scotland, her close kin connections to Henry made the Scottish lords suspicious and distrustful of her. There were many in Scotland who, despite, or maybe because of, the disaster at Flodden, wished to maintain the Auld Alliance over any kind of treaty with England. Albany was a useful substitute because he would ensure the continuation of a Franco-Scottish alliance. Albany could not enter Scotland at this point, he needed the permission of the French king, but in a show of support he did send Seigneur de la Bastie who, it was well known to the Scottish nobles, had been a favorite of James IV.²⁰⁴ While some of the Scottish lords were planning to cement their alliance with the French, Margaret wanted to ensure peace with England in her son's country. In February 1514, she was able to extract a truce from Henry that would last a year and a day, and the promise that a lasting peace would be arranged by an embassy that would be sent to London.²⁰⁵ Rather than elevating the Scottish lords' perception of Margaret, she was further stigmatized as an ally of England. At this point in her tenure as regent, Margaret's political clout was waning. It was not that she did not have political networks to deploy; rather they were the wrong political networks to have in Scotland.

²⁰³ Patrick Fraser Tytler, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of Alexander Iii. To the Union*(Edinburg: Nimmo, 1864), 296.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 297.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

The factionalism traditional in the Scottish court was once again emerging in the political landscape now that James IV was dead. Without a strong king or a regent they fully supported to manage them, the nobles began to fight among themselves. As this was happening, Margaret's position as regent was made even weaker because she had to leave court to begin her confinement to give birth to James IV's posthumous child. In April of 1514, at Stirling Castle, she delivered a boy who was baptized Alexander Duke of Ross. The abbot of Dunfermline, the archdeacon of St. Andrews, and the Bishop of Caithness were named his godfathers.²⁰⁶ Margaret herself likely chose all of these men because as regent and the sole living parent to the child, she had the authority to do so. The archdeacon of St. Andrews and the bishop of Caithness were both members of the smaller council Parliament had arranged to "remain daily with the queen's grace."²⁰⁷ Her election of the Alexander Stewart, bishop of Caithness as godfather was a further extension of her previously established social ties because he was a relative of Margaret's old friend Sir John Sinclair.

Upon her return to court, Margaret found she had lost even more power, and governed Scotland in name only. While she had been at Stirling, the lords on the Council of Scotland had met and there was a clear divide emerging between the lords on the issue of England. As Dacre wrote to Henry in March, "the young lords are always thwarting the purposes of the others," while the majority of the lords favored, "Albany's coming", though they still had no news of when he might

²⁰⁶ Leslie, *The Historie of Scotland*, V, 150.

²⁰⁷ Hannay, *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs, 1501-1554: Selections from the Acta Dominorum Concilii; Introductory to the Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 4.

arrive.²⁰⁸ The country was divided politically between the powerful noble families. The Earls of Huntly and Crawford controlled lands in the north; Alexander Lord Hume and the Earl of Angus, who had recently been raised to the head of the house of Douglas after his father's death at Flodden, fought viciously over their influence in the south; and the Earl of Arran was of royal blood and saw all the rest of the nobles clamoring for power as usurpers²⁰⁹. Margaret was aware that the discord among the nobility needed to be remedied, but her only political ally was Henry. The main political strategy left to her was to alert the Scots that Henry was threatening war again if Albany should enter the country.²¹⁰ Even though politically the lords were moving away from her and it was unlikely she would receive the support of the whole body of the nobility, she was not completely isolated. Margaret was still able to deploy her natal networks in this time of political strife.

Both despite and because of the politically tenuous position she found herself in, Margaret married the Earl of Angus in secret on August 6th, 1514, "not admitting on her counsel any of the nobility, neither her brother king Henry, consenting," and "following the counsel of his friends, she shortly committed the governing of the Realm to him." As she was no longer a widow, James's will stipulated that Margaret immediately lost the regency. When she and Angus tried to enter Edinburgh to take control of the government, the Bishop of Glasgow made moves to block their entry, and the pair retreated to the

²⁰⁸ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. I, no. 2714.

²⁰⁹ Tytler, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of Alexander Iii. To the Union*, 297.

²¹⁰ Leslie, *The Historie of Scotland*, V, 153.

border.²¹¹ This marriage was certainly precipitated by passion, as both Margaret and Angus were young and he was notoriously handsome without being an especially able or intelligent statesman.²¹² Despite this, Angus did bring Margaret the power and protection of the house of Douglas and a stable marital network. With her natal family so far away, she had lacked the protection of an effective Scottish family. In her weak political position within the kingdom, the formation of a new marital network was almost as important to Margaret as the strength of her ardor for her new husband.

Once Margaret's clandestine marriage was revealed, Scotland became even more divided into two factions—one pro-English, and the other pro-French. At the head of the English faction were Angus and Margaret. Though they had the support of the powerful house of Douglas, they did not have many other allies. The French faction consisted of most of the Scottish nobility who still wanted revenge against England for their defeat at Flodden, and who were loathe to see one of their rival nobles raised so high.²¹³ Following her marriage, Margaret's familial networks embodied both of these complaints, and she became especially unpopular politically. In a meeting of the Council of Lords, Lord Hume was supposed to have said, "Our old laws do not permit that a woman should govern in the most peaceable times, far less now when such evils

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 151-52.

²¹² Tytler, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of Alexander Iii. To the Union*, 298.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 299.

do threaten as can scarcely be resisted by the wisest and most sufficient men.”²¹⁴

In addition to her unfavorable familial ties, Margaret was a woman, which made her even more politically undesirable to the lords. Additionally, she had already begun to help her marital family politically when she appointed Angus’s uncle Gavin Douglas as abbot of the important monastery of Arbroath.²¹⁵ Margaret had utilized the last of her ties to the Scottish nobility, and now had to rely upon her kin and marital connections, and the first step was to ensure that her new family was as powerful as possible.

The Scottish lords now turned to the Duke of Albany as their hope for the regency. Following the conclusion of a peace between France and England, Louis was inclined to send Albany to show the Scots that he intended to maintain the Auld Alliance. Henry responded to this plan by warning the lords how dangerous it would be for them, and their infant king, to accept the Duke of Albany as regent. Despite this, plans went ahead, and though he was much delayed, by May 1515, the French regent was ready to take control of Scotland.²¹⁶

In the interim, Margaret’s situation in Scotland became even more tenuous. her interactions with England begin to mirror those of English widows seeking assistance from the English court. Though she remained the most

²¹⁴ Agnes Strickland and Elisabeth Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of Scotland and English Princesses Connected with the Regal Succession of Great Britain* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851), 97.

²¹⁵ Tytler, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of Alexander Iii. To the Union*, 297.

²¹⁶ William Drummond and Richard active Gaywood, *The History of Scotland, from the Year 1423. Until the Year 1542: Containing the Lives and Reigns of James the I. The Ii. The Iii. The Iv. The V. With Several Memorials of State, During the Reigns of James Vi. & Charls I.* (London printed by Henry Hills, for Rich. Tomlins and himself, 1655), 159.

powerful woman in Scotland, she was largely without allies, with the exception of her husband's family, and opposed on all sides by the Scottish nobles. This was an exceptional situation because in most circumstances, a widow's remarriage allowed for new protection from the husband, and she no longer needed the same help from the crown. However, Margaret's status, which was well protected while she remained a widow, was immediately challenged by her remarriage. Her last resort in an attempt to retain her regency was to appeal to the English crown. Margaret was in a unique position in that Henry was also her brother, and was inherently invested in maintaining control in Scotland.

Although she was already involved in English networks through her natal ties to Henry, she was now integrating into the larger political body of the court.

Confronted with the power crisis in Scotland, Margaret became involved in the dissemination of information that flowed through the north of England to the court. Though she had been brought to this point by her poor political maneuvering, Margaret created and utilized new networks to bolster her position.

Margaret retreated to Stirling with her children, where she entered into communication with Lord Dacre for the first time since her initial entrance into Scotland. Dacre maintained spies in Scotland, and was at the center of a diffuse network of information. He used this system to dispatch letters between Margaret and Henry, keeping each abreast of the situations unfolding in each kingdom. In November 1514, the Archbishop of Glasgow, who headed the pro-French faction, and his forces besieged Margaret within the castle. Though she

expected Angus to raise the siege, it was a dangerous position to be in because she was losing money very quickly and she hoped the English army would enter Scotland to assist her. Mindful of the maintenance of her networks, even while trapped within Stirling, Margaret wrote to Henry asking him to show favor to Adam Williamson, her messenger and advisor. She also sought his assistance in securing the archbishopric of St. Andrews for Gavin Douglas, as she wanted to elevate him even farther within in the church, and hoped Henry would write to the pope on his behalf.²¹⁷ When the position was instead granted to the earl of Arran's brother, Margaret continued to try to shore up whatever power she could in the time left available to her before Albany's entry. She tried again and granted Douglas the vacant bishopric of Dunkeld. She wrote two, ultimately successful, letters to the Pope, cosigning her name with James's, in order to have Douglas confirmed in the position by Rome.²¹⁸ In addition to being a way of extending familial power, this was also a reward for Douglas's support of Margaret. Through Margaret, Douglas also became part of the web of communication centered in the north of England, and he was in contact with Lord Dacre and Adam Williamson.²¹⁹

Margaret couldn't make many other political moves because she was already low on money, and therefore could not try to seize power in Scotland without English support. However, England was unwilling to send an army into Scotland for fear it would seem as if Henry were invading. Instead, Henry

²¹⁷ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. I, no. 3468.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol II, no. 31.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 27.

devised another plan—he wanted Margaret to flee to England with her children, and once there, he would name James as his heir because he still did not have a son. Margaret responded that, “if I were such a woman that might go with my bairn in mine arm,” she would not hesitate to flee in order to receive Henry’s protection and England’s wealth, but as it was, she could not remove her son from Scotland in fear for his life and throne if they were discovered.²²⁰ It was also around this time that Margaret wrote to Henry establishing a code she would use to establish if her letters were authentic or coerced—she would sign “Your loving sister,” if the letter was genuine, or “Margaret R.” if it was not.²²¹ The utilization of the nexus of communication was crucial here. Due to the distance that separated Margaret from the English court, the assurance that information was authentic was important for the proper maintenance of networks.

As the winter finally passed into spring and Albany prepared to enter Scotland, there was little Margaret or her faction could do. Albany had the support of most of the lords at this point, and Margaret was living in poverty, having run out of money during the siege. She was reduced to asking for money from Henry, citing the dishonor it would bring England to have her reduced to destitution.²²² Despite this emphasis on Scotland’s perception of the English king and Henry’s own desire to see Margaret reinstated as regent, he did not

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 3468.

²²¹ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 169.

²²² *Ibid.*, 238.

send sufficient funds to aid her cause, and there was nothing Margaret could do once Albany finally entered Scotland on May 17th 1515.²²³

Albany's ascension to the regency marked a period of decline for Margaret and any hopes she had of regaining power for the time being. He began by seizing first her most powerful allies, and then her children. Angus's grandfather Lord Drummond, the constable of Stirling Castle, was arrested and imprisoned in the castle of Blackness for boxing the Lion herald on the ears during an earlier audience with Margaret. Gavin Douglas, now bishop of Dunkeld, was also arrested on the charge have illegally acquired his nomination to the bishopric through Henry's influence at the Papal court. Following these two prominent arrests, the other lords who had supported Margaret, with the exception of Angus and Hume, began to favor Albany instead.²²⁴ Hume faced his own share of threats for his continued alliance with Margaret and the house of Douglas. Albany tried to force Hume out of Scotland and into exile in England, and when that didn't work he had his servants burn down Hume's castle.²²⁵ Margaret's political networks continued to disintegrate, leaving her with almost no chance of reclaiming power.

Now that Margaret's power base was sufficiently weakened, Albany and the lords turned to the issue of her sons. Margaret still had custody of them, but the lords were worried she would abscond with them to England and place them

²²³ *Ibid.*, 240.

²²⁴ Tytler, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of Alexander Iii. To the Union*, 302.

²²⁵ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. II, no. 861.

under the control of Henry. Rather than allow this to happen, Albany assembled Parliament at Edinburgh where they determined that the young king and his brother were to be entrusted to the custody of three of lords who would be chosen by Parliament and confirmed by Margaret. She was not willing to part with her children, however, and she prepared to hold onto custody of her sons for as long as possible. When the lords approached Stirling Castle in order to collect the children, Margaret met them at the gates with James holding her hand, and had the gates closed on them, before she announced that she would need six days to think about their proposal. This would have an especially affecting sight with the small king clinging to his mother as she tried her best to protect him, and it worked especially well at Stirling where she was quite popular with the members of the household. That Margaret had fostered these friendly connections proved beneficial because the residents of Stirling were willing to assist her in this time of political crisis. Although this network could not directly intervene for Margaret in any way, it does show the diversity of the individuals who could become tied to one another.

Eventually, Margaret said she would only release them to Angus, Hume, the earl of Marshal, and the Lauder of the Bass—all of whom were staunchly pro-English. This was politically calculated to remind the lords of the power of her English allies, even though she had been weakened in Scotland. It was not until Albany marched on Stirling with 7,000 men that Margaret finally

relinquished control of the royal children.²²⁶ This rupture of the connection between her and her children was particularly devastating because Margaret had not been separated from them for more than a short period of time during their young lives, and because they symbolized Scottish royal power, and now Margaret had lost another political advantage.

Margaret once again turned to England for help, expressing her discontent with Albany and the Scottish lords for their treatment of her friends and their withholding of her jewels and rents. There was little she could do at the moment though, because she was pregnant and almost ready for her confinement. In her heavily pregnant state, Albany let her retreat to Linlithgow, a town closer to the English border. Margaret then concocted a plot with Dacre to escape into England. Her attempt was successful, and she reached Dacre's home in Morpeth. Albany entreated her to return, even promising to restore her jewels to her if she complied. Margaret refused, and gave birth to her daughter Margaret Douglas on October 7th. When she wrote to the regent to announce the birth of her daughter, she also demanded that he return, "the whole rule and government," of both her sons and, "the realm of Scotland, according to the last will and testament of my late spouse and husband."²²⁷

Margaret spent some months with Dacre; first while she recovered from a post-pregnancy illness, and then while she conducted negotiations with Albany,

²²⁶ Tytler, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of Alexander Iii. To the Union*, 302-03.

²²⁷ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 216.

which was more efficiently done from the north. Albany continued to press her to return, but she steadfastly refused unless he released the bishop of Dunkeld, Lord Drummond, returned her jewels to her, and the castles of Temptallon and Bothwell to Angus.²²⁸ Albany's responses promised nothing, but suggested that these goals could be achieved through the establishment of peace between England and Scotland, and he especially entreated her to work with Wolsey to create a truce.²²⁹ While in residence at Morpeth, Margaret and Dacre may have developed a friendship, though it is not evidenced in their letters. It is clear, however, that they developed a firm connection based on their political interests for Scotland and England, as they worked together throughout the regency crisis. The resolution of this political tension would serve them both well, because Margaret would have secured Scotland for her son, and Dacre would have fewer expenses in the maintenance of the border.

In May 1516, Margaret finally travelled south to London and she remained with the court for a year. Once at court, Margaret was in a privileged position to develop more networks because of her blood ties to both Henry and James. In particular, Margaret created a connection to Cardinal Wolsey. This relationship began as a simple exchange of political information, but Margaret was soon asking the cardinal for money to reward her servants and allies in England and Scotland. Wolsey obliged, and thus began their financial and political network.²³⁰ As she was in a strategic position of influence, a monetary

²²⁸ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. II, no. 1598.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 1493.

²³⁰ Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, I, 128-30.

investment in Margaret would likely benefit Wolsey politically in the long run. Margaret integrated herself into the English court during her visit, and in doing so she formed new links she could deploy in her favor. Margaret also reinforced her kinship ties to Henry, her sister Mary, dowager queen of France, and Catherine of Aragon, through active participation in court rituals.²³¹ Again, this added support benefitted her position in Scotland because it meant she could continue to rely on her natal ties.

In the summer of 1517, plans for Margaret's return to Scotland began when they heard news from Dacre that Albany was returning for France for a short time. While she had been in England, her younger son Alexander had died, but once she reentered the kingdom, she was still not permitted to take custody of her son. Her time in England and the creation of strong networks in the English court meant that the Scottish lords viewed her with even more suspicion than before.

When the four months Parliament had allowed Albany to spend in France passed without his return, Margaret's faction began to plan a coup. During his absence, the factionalism of the Scottish lords had once again led to conflict among them, and De la Bastie, Albany's stand-in as regent was murdered by the Humes. Margaret saw an opportunity to once again seize power in the vacuum that was left behind by lack of a clear leader. This time, Margaret did not attempt to take the regency for herself—rather she sought to have her husband Angus established as regent. She wrote to Dacre to this effect, and though he was wary

²³¹ Walter Thornbury, *Westminster Hall: Notable Events in Old and New London*, vol. III(London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1878), 544-60.

of becoming involved in such a tenuous plot, he was also eager for anything that would disrupt Albany's hold on Scotland. Dacre assured her of England's support for Angus as long as they amassed enough support among Angus's friends as well.²³² Dacre's response highlights the power of Margaret's specific role as an inhabitant of both English and Scottish networks. If Margaret had been trying to seize the regency for herself, it is more likely that Dacre would have offered more support because of her integration into many English political networks. With her as regent, Henry would have a direct line to the Scottish crown, and the other nobles she had connected with would benefit as well. It was also significant that Dacre noted that if Angus didn't have other allies, England would not risk involvement. It was crucial that the pair deploy all of their connections for this to work, even their secondary or tertiary links. They needed the support of as many Scottish nobles as possible.

In the end, this attempted coup did not work because the lords were not willing to subject themselves to Angus's rule. Power remained in the hands of Albany and a truce with England was concluded. This truce stemmed from an alliance that had been drawn up between England and Scotland for the purpose of protecting Christian Europe. Most crucially, this alliance stipulated that in exchange for Henry returning the French city of Tournay that he had captured earlier in his reign, Francis would not allow Albany to return to Scotland under any circumstances. The creation of treaties was important, because as a formal, legal document, it solidified networks. With Albany out of Scotland, England

²³² *Letters and Papers*, Vol. II, no. 3713, pt. ii.

began to increase border raids and Dacre worked to destabilize the lords as well, in an attempt to harass the Scots into forming a treaty with the English and breaking with the French.²³³

At this time, Margaret was in a dire financial situation. While Margaret had been in England, Angus had struck up an affair, and begun to seize Margaret's lands from her. She wrote to Henry in distress about her poor treatment by the lords who refused to give her the rents she was owed and by her own husband who was withholding her money as well.²³⁴ The rupture of her marriage left her once again without a strong network of support in Scotland. Furthermore, Henry was not helping her at all because he was employing different methods of trying to break the Franco-Scots alliance. Her natal connections were crumbling as well. Her situation only became more desperate as time went on and she became poorer and had to sell her jewels. Furthermore, she has not been allowed to see her son either, and so with no money and separated from her child, Margaret wanted to return to England. She had switched her appeals to Dacre at this point, as both Wolsey and Henry had ceased to support her in Scotland, but she asked Dacre to talk to them both to, "remember upon, and to help me, for I am at a sore point."²³⁵

With none of her familial links to bolster her, Margaret turned to Albany for help. Dacre responded to Margaret's entreaty to Albany with criticism. He

²³³ Eaves, *Henry VIII's Scottish Diplomacy, 1513-1524: England's Relations with the Regency Government of James V*, 72.

²³⁴ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 230.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

berated her for changing her mind after she wanted to see Albany gone for so long, and he emphasized all that Henry had done for her to keep him out of Scotland. He also highlighted Albany's falseness towards her including his, "brutal oaths and promises made of and for your causes."²³⁶ Margaret defended herself and her relationship with Henry and wrote, "for I have made no fault in no way to the king's grace, my brother, nor his realm."²³⁷ Margaret refused to desist in exploring the option that Albany's return to Scotland would provide her with a better quality of life than what the Scots, or English, were currently offering her. After relations broke down between France and England, Francis allowed Albany to return to Scotland on December 3rd 1521.²³⁸ Margaret had to try to create new networks following the disintegration of her familial networks. This also reinforced the fact that her place in Dacre's network was dependent on her natal ties, and with the break down of those, her relationship with Dacre was altered as well.

Following Albany's return, Margaret's primary political function was again that of peacekeeper between Scotland and England, though she embarked upon this quest with much more success than she had exhibited in the build up to Flodden. She wrote to England hoping to establish a truce, and managed to convince Albany not to give assistance to the rebels who wanted to attack

²³⁶ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. III, no. 373.

²³⁷ Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain, from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 237.

²³⁸ Tytler, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of Alexander Iii. To the Union*, 317.

England.²³⁹ Margaret's position in Scotland did improve for a time as Albany exiled Angus, finally granting her the separation from him she had longed for, and he entreated for her rents to be restored to her. However, her interventions for peace and her acknowledgement of Albany's kind treatment of her led Henry and Dacre to further berate her for her lack of support for the English cause.²⁴⁰ Margaret responded with a hearty defense of her actions, but it was not enough to appease the English.²⁴¹ By embracing her Scottish ties, Margaret had lost the support of her two most valued English connections.

Despite the relationship that had been formed between Albany and Margaret, it had become clear to her that the only real way for her to maintain influence, keep herself out of poverty, and be with her son was to free James from the regency. So, she embarked upon an important political gamble. Albany had been keeping her away from her son and under the tutelage of her enemies, had reaffirmed the Treaty of Rouen with France, and was pushing Parliament to agree to find James a French bride.²⁴² While Margaret balked at being kept from her son, Henry was desperately trying to break the Auld Alliance. With Henry's support, once Albany had returned to France again, she began to utilize the networks available to her.

Margaret deployed two crucial networks during this time that allowed her to maximize the flow of information and communication that was necessary

²³⁹ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. III, no.1937.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 1949.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, no. 2038.

²⁴² Eaves, *Henry VIII's Scottish Diplomacy, 1513-1524: England's Relations with the Regency Government of James V*, 153.

to stage a political takeover. The first connection she utilized was to John Cantly, who was in charge of communication between her and the earl of Surrey. Margaret needed Surrey's help in seizing power from Albany. She wanted Surrey to arrange a truce for a few months to appease Albany in the hopes that he would sail for France and Margaret could act. Margaret trusted him enough to pass information to the earl and return with news, as she asked the earl to, "answer in the matters which John Cantly will explain." The flow of letters continued smoothly, because of Cantly's involvement as an intermediary link. The exchange of verbal communication through a single messenger persisted between Margaret and Surrey because again, Cantly went to Surrey "on matter which I cannot write." He also acted as a counselor, as Surrey relayed Cantly's musings on a meeting between the lords to decide if they would forgo the regency.²⁴³ Cantly's place in this network proved beneficial to all parties. With James as king, Margaret named Cantly archdeacon of St. Andrews and made him an ambassador to England.²⁴⁴ This relationship was crucial to the flow and dissemination of news and information in this time of political struggle.

The other important intermediary was the prioress of Coldstream, who was also one of Dacre's spies. Margaret seems to have been especially fond of the prioress because she wrote to Surrey on two occasions to make sure the prioress was protected on the border, and that she would not be tried for treason as the king had threatened.²⁴⁵ The prioress reported on Margaret's movements and

²⁴³ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. III, nos. 3551, 3552, 3553, 3576.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 1462.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 2912.

actions to Dacre, but Margaret appears to have been unaware of this as she once called her, “my only secure messenger.”²⁴⁶ Her reports on Margaret’s interactions with Albany appear to have been satisfactorily poor for her English lord, and once Dacre knew she was serious about rupturing her link with Albany, Margaret received English support.²⁴⁷ Again, a trustworthy intermediary was crucial to the success of Margaret’s plan. Through the prioress, Margaret was able to reform her ties to the English northern lords, which then reaffirmed her networks with the English court.

Eventually, she was able to gather support from more of the nobles than she had previously been able to, chief among them the Earl of Arran and the Earl of Lennox. The lords then took James from Stirling to Edinburgh where he was fully invested with the Scottish crown at only twelve years old. Henry was so pleased with this turn of events that he sent two hundred soldiers to guard the king and sent money to both Margaret and Arran.²⁴⁸ Through the deployment of her networks, Margaret had accomplished what she had long sought out to do—she had political control once more and her son was safe with her.

Following this extended period of crisis, Margaret continued to exercise her political networks, but in much lower stake situations. She wrote to Henry hoping to secure a pardon for George Hay, whose “knowledge of literature will be useful in Scotland,” and she made several requests for safe passage for Scots through England. Margaret maintained her connections to Catherine of Aragon

²⁴⁶ Ibid., nos. 3553, 3554, 3555, 3567.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., no. 3350.

²⁴⁸ Tytler, *The History of Scotland from the Accession of Alexander Iii. To the Union*, 329.

and they exchanged letters about the princess Mary, among other common topics. She also remained active in Wolsey's network, and they exchanged information that included details about crop productions in Scotland and the Scottish embassy she had worked to send to England.²⁴⁹ These networks remained useful to Margaret, even when she was not in dire need of intervention. Rather they show how even for the royal family, their networks were deployed in all manner of situations, not just for explicit political maneuvering.

The study of Margaret's life up until 1525 offers a unique view of how noblewomen used their networks in times of crisis when they were isolated from their main support systems. Because her primary networks extended across borders and her political allegiance was often questioned, Margaret should have been particularly isolated during this period. However, she was not. Instead, she formed new relationships and links within Scottish society and with the English courtiers with whom she became involved. Margaret's ability to create new ties in a foreign society was something that was expected of almost all princesses who entered into arranged marriages, often much farther away. While hers is a unique case within the study of aristocratic women in England, Margaret is also unique within the scope of princesses because she was directly at the center of the turmoil between her home country and adopted kingdom. It was through the creation and utilization of diverse links within both Scottish and

²⁴⁹ *Letters and Papers*, Vol. IV, nos. 835, 847, 859, 862, 864, 869, 876, 890, 891.

English society that Margaret was ultimately able to succeed politically in Scotland after twelve long years.

Conclusion

Noblewomen in Tudor England developed complex, multistrand, and multidimensional networks that connected them to significant clusters of allies and intermediaries, and provided them with the means to exert influence in their social world. Their activities do not fit narrowly into either the public or the private sphere. As is demonstrated by the present analysis of their vast networks, the connections they made transcended these artificial boundaries. Women remained active in the political, domestic, and economic management of their natal and marital families; they formed friendships outside of the home; they participated in the diffuse spread of information that shaped both political policy and the daily operation of households; they formed connections with the king and his ministers, again leveraging connections to secure both political and domestic assistance. From wives of knights to those of royal blood, aristocratic women integrated into and acted within these diverse networks.

Noblewomen had a system of connections they utilized in the daily management of their estates and families, but only a specific section of this system could be counted on for help in times of crisis. Establishing a variety of networks that one could then rely on in different circumstances was crucial for the maintenance of Tudor society. By creating as many connections as possible, noblewomen improved their chances that at least one of these ties would provide assistance when it was truly needed. While Margaret could rely on this system to ensure she had a network of messengers to control the flow of information, she was uniquely subject to the pressures of the king's politics. In a way no other

noblewomen could be, Margaret's deployment of networks depended greatly on the foreign policy adopted by the Scottish lords and King Henry, rather than on the strength of her secondary or tertiary connections.

The focus on noblewomen as a social group for the first two chapters, and Margaret Tudor as a specific case for the final chapter, reflects two distinct approaches to social network analysis—the whole network framework versus the egocentric approach. The whole network method focuses on capturing all essential and relevant connections between all of the actors within a given social system. In this case, the social system was the interconnected aristocracy of Tudor England, and the relevant linkages were defined as those involving female participation. An egocentric approach, in contrast, is one that privileges the links created and used by a single actor, rather than the whole. In this method, the focus is placed on how these ties can shape an individual life, through mechanisms of affection, support, and action. Many network analysts believe the whole network approach is superior because it offers a way to better understand a social system as a whole. However, others have argued that the two used in conjunction can better highlight the operations of a society as seen through the dense web of connections that were formed and utilized.²⁵⁰

This thesis, consequently, has approached noblewomen's networks from two distinct points of view. By establishing the whole network view through the study of noblewomen's actions within different relationships and during times of stability and of crisis, the social maneuvering of these women as a group becomes

²⁵⁰ Charles Wetherell, "Historical Social Network Analysis," *International Review of Social History* 43, no. S6 (1998): 125-44.

clearer. The addition of an egocentric network approach, employed in the chapter on Margaret, allows for the exploration of how a single noblewoman's experience might be shaped uniquely, in this case, through the force of her royal connections.

Network theory also involves the exploration of weak and strong ties, which affects the overall pattern of interconnection and obligation. This approach is particularly relevant to the study of women's expansive networks, because of the diversity of relationships they utilized for their benefit. The strength of a tie is defined by a combination of the amount of time expended on its maintenance, the level of emotional investment it entails, and the reciprocity of assistance it elicits. Most models of interpersonal networks emphasize intimate, close relationships formed between individuals on the basis of family or geography and involve direct interaction and the maintenance of strong ties. These models speak to both natal and marital kinship and to the creation of close friendships. These strong links reflect the social identity of an individual, and map the way in which belonging to a certain group informs his or her social development. Naturally, entering into a new network based on strong ties, such as marrying into a new family, necessarily shifts the makeup of a social network, and allows it to develop in distinct directions. Most relationships based on strong ties form within clusters, where everyone within the cluster knows the other members. It is these clusters that exert the most social influence and that affect an individual most when it comes to the transmission of information and formation of ideas.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited."

The impact of strong ties is seen repeatedly in the social networks of Tudor noblewomen. Familial networks are, unsurprisingly, often the most important connections a noblewoman can deploy, both for help in daily life and in situations of personal or political crisis. The assistance can come from any part of the cluster—parents or siblings, in-laws or godparents—because these strong ties have already been developed and nurtured through proximity, affection, shared identity, or a sense of responsibility. Margaret's situation in Scotland can be viewed through this lens because her position as a link between her natal and both her marital families created a unique cross-kingdom cluster. While the elevation to the stage of foreign policy changes the idea of the cluster some, the linkages across these diverse family groups remain defined by strong ties.

The importance of weak ties has become increasingly acknowledged in the study of interpersonal networks. Weak ties refer to the connections formed between people with no emotional history and that are employed infrequently, as in financial transactions and communication with the ministers at the court. It is weak ties that allow for the social cohesion of disparate, isolated clusters as they merge into a larger, unified, and amorphous network that cuts across boundaries of geography, family, religion, class, and, gender. These connections are able to link individuals from different clusters in a way that strong ties cannot. While strong ties breed local cohesion because of their focus on a specific region or a specific group of people, this can cause fragmentation among disparate groups. Weak ties can, in contrast, create opportunities for individuals to integrate into new networks, outside of the confines of their habitual links. The emphasis on the

strength of connections instead of their distinctiveness ignores the importance of those links that allow participants to break from their traditional clusters. It is notable when people act outside their clusters to create new, diverse networks.²⁵²

This theory can be seen at work in the networks of Tudor noblewomen. In their interactions with the economy and the court, women were often leaving their strong clusters and entering into relationships based on weak ties. This was also true of their links to messengers, who played a crucial role in the dissemination of information, but did not form emotionally significant bonds with their employers. The development of connections with Cromwell straddled the line between weak and strong ties in many cases. The sheer volume of time required for these women to build this relationship suggested that ties were significant, but on the whole, this kind of network falls on the side of a weak connection. In most cases, Cromwell's involvement in their affairs was managed in an official, businesslike capacity that privileged the smooth running of government and society; he was not intervening with or for them because of any deep bonds they had formed. The same was true of connections formed directly with the king—these were generally ties based on management and were deployed only occasionally. Although not emotionally resonant or frequently employed, these ties were nonetheless a significant connection to what was sometimes a distant world of law, wealth, and power.

Widows were in a singular position because their clusters were often disintegrating. Out of necessity they had to rely on their weak ties to support

²⁵² *Ibid.*

themselves. Networks formed with court ministers provided a critical set of connections, and served to enhance the flow of information and resources much like relying on many weak ties for financial and social gain. Although Margaret's situation is again notably unique because her connections to the court were often also her connections to her family, even she activated both strong and weak ties in her search for support and relief. Though less frequently deployed, her relationship to messengers, to the Scottish lords, and to the English lords who acted as intermediaries between her and Henry can be viewed as weak ties, because they involved thin strand connections to actors outside her primary cluster. These linkages provided secondary connections that allowed her to maintain her campaign for assistance even as her strong ties failed.

When viewed through the framework of network theory, it becomes clear that noblewomen occupied such varied networks because of their deployment of both strong and weak ties. The use of these connections also allowed these women to contribute in a robust way to the financial, political, and familial systems of the age because they did not have to rely on just one kind of connection. The proliferation of different kinds of linkages lent itself to women's involvement in different aspects of Tudor society.

The active participation of noblewomen in diffuse networks, utilizing both strong and weak ties during the reign of Henry VIII facilitated the transition that took place with the ascensions of Mary I and Elizabeth I later in the century. As the present study demonstrates, even before the queens were crowned the roles of noblewomen had begun to evolve further. In Henrician England, they

were already involved in negotiations for court placement and family advancement, management of land holdings and wealth, and complex legal advocacy.

The reigns of two female monarchs necessarily caused a drastic shift in the political operations of women at the court. Beginning with the ascension of Mary in 1553, the Privy Chamber, which had been built up to become a powerful political entity under Henry VIII and maintained most of that power under Edward VI, was completely changed. With a female monarch in power, the Privy Chamber could no longer be a male dominated space; male servants could not serve her and her male courtiers could not freely enter her personal chambers. Instead, the offices of the Privy Chamber were given to women. Under Mary, this space lost its politicized atmosphere. She chose women who had served her faithfully before she was queen, and her ladies did not overtly seek patronage or favor for their husbands or male relatives. Because of this pattern, Mary seems to have pointedly designed a Privy Chamber that was less involved in the political machinations of the court. However, women were now able to operate in an official capacity within the government, which marked a significant change.²⁵³

When Elizabeth assumed the monarchy, women in the Privy Chamber assumed a more political role than they had under Mary, but still not to the degree that the officers of the chamber had enjoyed under Henry. Within the Privy Chamber, women were relegated into specific positions in order to wait upon the queen in her private chambers and to serve as her entourage in public.

²⁵³ Starkey, *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, 140-41.

There were four Ladies of the Bedchamber, eight Gentlewomen of the Privy Chamber, and six ladies of the high nobility. A few women were elevated further and named to positions such as Chief Gentlewoman and Mistress of the Robes. On the surface, these roles had been stripped of all political function. The Chief Gentleman in Henry's chamber had also been in charge of the Privy Purse and had the ability to sign documents in the king's stead—both of these duties were withheld from the Chief Gentlewoman. The chief secretarial and financial functions that officers of the Privy Chamber had exerted were no longer present during Elizabeth's reign because these were now positions maintained by women.²⁵⁴

Despite this decline in the official political capabilities of the Privy Chamber, the women who held positions under Elizabeth were still able to maintain active political roles even if they were not involved in governance. Women of the Privy Chamber were regularly involved in the promotion of suits and petitions for courtiers looking for pardons, grants of land or offices, and licenses to travel abroad.²⁵⁵ They were also involved in diplomatic relations through communication with ambassadors and foreign nobility. Lady Mary Sidney, Lady Frances Cobham and Lady Elizabeth Clinton were all in contact with the duchess of Feria in Spain, and Lady Sidney also wrote to the Spanish ambassador often. Their involvement in the dissemination of information about Elizabeth was also crucial within the English court. Courtiers utilized their connections to her ladies to gauge the queen's mood before presenting a petition,

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 150-52.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 161.

and noblemen not at court often relied on the advice of her ladies before addressing the queen herself. Elizabeth also deployed her ladies' networks in some cases. When she wanted the earl of Rutland recalled to court from France, she had Elizabeth Stafford, a member of the Privy Chamber, write to him because she knew they were already in communication.²⁵⁶ Even though they were not allowed the same administrative duties their male counterparts had held, women of the Privy Chamber were able to use their position to enter new networks outside of the court they would otherwise not have had access to.

The ease with which noblewomen moved into these official court positions is in no small part based on the experience they already had operating in distinct networks. As a group, they had already been positioned to spread information and knew how to successfully petition a monarch through the deployment of political connections to courtiers. This did not change with the ascension of female monarchs; rather, women now had greater flexibility to maneuver within their political roles, expanding on the networks they had already created and maintained.

Women outside of the court also continued to participate in diffuse networks across the country. Noblewomen were still actively involved in petitioning the crown for favors or assistance, just as they had been during Henry's reign. They sought titles, offices, and lucrative holdings for their husbands, children, and other family members; they purchased wardships, managed estates, and arranged marriages; and they sought assistance when they

²⁵⁶ Daybell, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*, 69, 72-74.

were in legal trouble.²⁵⁷ Female centered networks based on familial connections and friendship were also evident. An exceptional example of this pattern was found in a petition from the disgraced Elizabeth Raleigh to Elizabeth seeking a pardon that was endorsed with the signatures of a dozen of her extended kin and other women who had recently been involved in legal struggles.²⁵⁸

The participation of noblewomen in the expansive and multifaceted networks of Tudor England contextualizes the role of women during this period. Women did not operate in isolation in either the domestic sphere or the political. Instead, they utilized their connections to rupture these categories. They engaged in economic decision-making, formed social bonds within and outside of their familial structures, operated within the court, and utilized the court from afar to their benefit. While this pattern is uniquely on display during the reign of Henry VIII, women's active involvement in networks that spanned the kingdom and different strands of society continued to play an important and relevant role in the development of networks throughout England in the decades, and centuries, that followed. And society was the sum of its networks.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 56.

²⁵⁸ Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 149-60.

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