

**Aristocratic Women at the
Late Elizabethan Court:
Politics, Patronage and Power**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the power of aristocratic women in politics and patronage in the final years of the Elizabethan court (1580 to 1603). Substantial archival sources are analysed to evaluate the concepts of female political agency discussed in scholarly literature, including women's roles in politics, within families, in networks and as part of the court patronage system. A case study methodology is used to examine the lives and careers of specific aristocratic women in three spheres of court politics – the politics of female agency, the politics of family and faction, and the politics of favour. The first case study looks at Elizabeth's long-serving lady-in-waiting, Anne Dudley, Countess of Warwick, and demonstrates that female political agents harnessed multiple sources of agency to exercise power at court on behalf of dense patronage networks. It introduces the original concept of a female 'companion favourite' who used a close personal relationship with the queen to become one of the most successful courtiers of the period and to rival the power of aristocratic men in a number of ways. Case studies on the Cooke sisters, Anne, Lady Bacon and Elizabeth, Lady Russell, examine their loyalties and obligations to male kin on either side of a political divide in the 1590s. For the first time, the activities of these aristocratic women are incorporated into the study of factionalism at the Elizabethan court and argue that a convergence of family and state politics enhanced women's political significance. The final series of case studies discusses the effect of kinship with an Elizabethan male favourite on women's political agency and analyses the interdependent flow of power between Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex and four of his closest female kin. The thesis uniquely examines the

ability of aristocratic women out of royal favour to exercise power and pursue feminine strategies for patronage. These case studies show that aristocratic women made their own decisions within the scope of kin obligations and highlight an overlap between family and independent political agency. The thesis concludes that the realities of a personal monarchy under a queen regnant meant that aristocratic women's roles in politics and patronage were integral to the effective functioning of the court and state, but that their sex determined how they exercised power. Whilst all aristocratic women at the late Elizabethan court were politically significant, those who mastered the exercise of power and wielded it appropriately took their political agency to a higher level.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Joanne Hocking

6/11/2015

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List of Abbreviations

Manuscript Collections

Add.	Additional Manuscripts
Cecil MS	Hatfield House, Cecil Papers (available via microfilm M485 and Cecil Papers Database at BL)
C	Chancery
E	Exchequer
Harl.	Harleian Manuscripts
Lans.	Lansdowne Manuscripts
Loseley	More Molyneux Family of Loseley Park: Historical Correspondence Volumes (online transcripts)
PROB 11	Prerogative Court of Canterbury wills
REQ	Court of Requests
SO	Signet Office
SP	State Papers
STAC	Star Chamber

Research Libraries and Archive Collections

BL	British Library, London
IHR	Institute for Historical Research, London
KHLC	Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone, Kent
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library, London
SHC	Surrey History Centre (online transcripts)
TNA	The National Archives, London
WCRO	Warwickshire County Record Office, Warwick

Printed Sources

<i>CP</i>	Cokayne, George E. <i>The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom, Extant, Extinct or Dormant</i> , 13 vols. Revised, enlarged edition. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1982.
<i>CPR</i>	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i>
<i>CSPD</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers Domestic</i>
<i>CSPS</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers Simancas</i>
<i>Hasler</i>	Hasler, P. W., ed. <i>The House of Commons 1558-1603</i> , 3 vols. London: published for the History of Parliament Trust by HMSO, 1981.
<i>HMC</i>	Historical Manuscripts Commission
<i>HMCD</i>	<i>Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle & Dudley ...</i>

- HMCP* *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland, Preserved at Welbeck Abbey*, Vol. 2. London: HMSO, 1893.
- HMCR* *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland, G.C.B., Preserved at Belvoir Castle*, Vol. 1. London: HMSO, 1888.
- HMCS* *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury ...*
- ODNB* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-2015.
- Progresses* Goldring, Elizabeth, Faith Eales, Elizabeth Clarke and Jayne Elisabeth Archer, eds. John Nichols's *'The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I': a New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*. 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Sidney Papers* Collins, Arthur, ed. *Letters and Memorials of State, in the Reigns of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, King James, King Charles the First, Part of the Reign of King Charles the Second, and Oliver's Usurpation*. 2 vols. London: T. Osborne, 1746.