

PARRY, BLANCHE (ap Harry, Aparry, Apparey, Apharrie and other forms (1507/8-1590), Chief Gentlewoman of Queen Elizabeth's most honourable Privy Chamber and Keeper of Her Majesty's jewels

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Name: Blanche Parry

Date of birth: 1507/8

Date of death: 1590

Parent: Alice Parry (née Milbourne)

Parent: Henry Parry

Gender: Female

Occupation: Chief Gentlewoman of Queen Elizabeth's most honourable Privy Chamber and Keeper of Her Majesty's jewels

Area of activity: Royalty and Society

Authors: Robert Thomas Jenkins, Ruth Elizabeth Richardson



Born between March 1507 and March 1508 at Newcourt, Bacton, in the Golden Valley of the River Dore, Ewias / Ewyas, Herefordshire, daughter of Henry Myles and his English wife Alice (Milborne). It was a Welsh-speaking household.

There are nine bardic poems that refer to Blanche's family: five by [Guto'r Glyn](#) and one each by [Gwilym Tew](#), [Howel Dafi](#), [Huw Cae Llywd](#) and [Lewys Morganwg](#) (see article on [Blanche Herbert, Lady Troy](#)). All are given in full, transcribed into modern Welsh and translated into English on www.blancheparry.com. One of [Guto'r Glyn's](#) poems, 'Harri Ddu o Ewas', gives the pedigree of this wide-branching family ([for Williams & J.L. Williams, eds, Gwaith Guto'r Glyn, 200-4 and 216-20](#)); it refers to Harri Ddu ap Gruffudd, Blanche's great-grandfather, steward of Usk, Caerleon and Ewyas Lacy under [Sir William Herbert, earl of Pembroke \(1st creation\)](#) and a supporter of the Duke of York and Edward IV.

Blanche's paternal grandparents were Miles ap Harry who married Joan, a daughter of [Sir Harry Stradling](#) of St. Donat's, Glamorganshire; Joan's mother was sister to [Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke](#), with descent from [Sir Dafydd Gam](#). (In 1811 stained-glass windows commemorating and depicting Miles ap Harry, Joan and their nineteen children were removed from Bacton Church in Herefordshire, to Atcham Church in Shropshire and at the same time a window to Blanche Parry was erected there.)

Blanche's father, Henry Myles, was three times sheriff of Herefordshire and steward of Dore Abbey, the latter an inherited family position and there were links between this abbey and the [Cecil / Sisilt](#) family of Al(l)t-yr-Ynys (near Bacton) where William Cecil, cousin of the great [Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley](#) lived; Olif / Olive Parry of Poston (cf. the article [Parry, James Rhys](#)), who was descended from Miles ap Harry's brother John, married into this family. The relationship of the Parrys and the [Cecils](#) was recognised by [Lord Burghley](#) - he calls Blanche 'my cousin' and she calls him 'kinsman' and 'my friend'; they worked closely together and he provided legal support; he drew up her two Wills, writing the notes for her First (nuncupative) Will of November 1578 in his own handwriting, and he was her chief executor for her 1589 Final Will.

Other families who intermarried with the Parrys included four branches of the Vaughans, Morgans of Gwent, Ewyas and Ystradyw, Powells of Penbeddel, de Barri, Whitneys and Knollys. Their connections were even wider and included nearly all the local gentry and the Devereux family (giving connections with the Earl of Leicester and Sir James Croft, Comptroller of the Queen's Household). Thomas Parry the 'queen's cofferer' (died 1560), son of [Henry Vaughan](#) of Tretower may have been a distant connection. [John Dee](#) claimed kinship but Blanche did not reciprocate and in fact [Dee](#) refers to her only three times - she was godmother (by deputy) of his son, a godson not mentioned by Blanche in either of her Wills; it is clear [Dee](#) was canvassing for her influence at Court.

Blanche's career was first partly described by C. A. Bradford who dispelled many legends about her; the fully researched biography [Mistress Blanche, Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante](#) now provides considerable detail about her and additional information is being posted on the companion web site: www.blancheparry.com.

The evidence suggests that it was Blanche Parry's aunt [Blanche Herbert, Lady Troy](#) who first brought her to the royal Court. [Lady Troy](#) was the Lady Mistress to Edward VI and Elizabeth I as children. Blanche Parry herself wrote in her Bacton epitaph that she was the queen's servant, 'whose cradle saw I rocked', from Elizabeth's birth in 1533; Blanche was then 25 or 26 years old. Thereafter she hardly left Elizabeth, staying with her until her own death fifty-six years later.

According to Sir Robert Tyrwhitt (Cal. State Papers, Edward VI, 31 January 1549) [Lady Troy](#) trained Blanche to be her successor but Kate Ashley was promoted instead from governess to Lady Mistress. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests Blanche attended Elizabeth when she was imprisoned in the Tower of London and then when she was under house-arrest. When Elizabeth succeeded to the throne in 1558 Blanche was initially second in the new queen's household, but became Chief Gentlewoman on Kate Ashley's death in 1565. As she was in charge of the Privy Chamber Blanche could control access to the queen. She was in charge of the queen's jewels (a collection which grew in quantity, magnificence and value) from before Elizabeth's accession, the Great Seal of England for two years, the queen's personal papers, clothes, furs and books. She received considerable sums of money on behalf of the queen. She was a conduit for passing information to the queen (including from John Vaughan, Blanche's nephew) and for the presentation of parliamentary bills. In addition she supervised the queen's linen 'and other things belonging to her majesty'; this included 'our musk cat', probably a ferret.

Throughout, Blanche acted as a confidante for the queen answering letters on her behalf. She was approached by those who wanted her to present their case to the queen, and evidently insisted on a clearly accurate presentation of the facts. This meant that Blanche was among the first to be allocated rooms when the queen was on a progress so that she would be within call for the queen. Queen Elizabeth treated Blanche as a baroness. Although 'uncareful of my wealth', relying on the queen to look after her, Blanche was granted two wardships and acquired property in Herefordshire, Wales (commissioning the first map of Llangorse Lake in 1584) and in Yorkshire. Her estate at death was worth about £½ million to £1 million in modern values (substantial for an unmarried lady but a fraction of, for example, the Earl of Leicester's). Her name recurs very frequently in official records, and there are references to her in contemporary literature. In 1575 George Gascoigne wrote of her:

For long and faithful service sake which hath abidden tuche,
Good Parry is a paragon, show me another such.

It is likely that a painting of the queen's presence chamber (in the Staatliche Museen - Graphische Sammlung Kassel 10430, Germany) shows Blanche at the centre of the Elizabethan Court chaperoning the queen, and in the company of [Burghley](#), Leicester, Clinton, Hatton and Walsingham. This painting depicts those considered the most influential at Court. (Names added later by someone who did not know the participants are incomplete and inaccurate.) Although Blanche was blind towards the end of her life (London, Lambeth Palace Library, Talbot Papers MS 3198, f. 552), this did not prevent her dealing with business (shown by her letter on behalf of James Parry) and she retained all her faculties to the end of her life.

Blanche died, unmarried, on Thursday 12 February 1589/90, aged 82 years, respected by all which was a rare achievement at the Tudor Court. Before November 1578 she had commissioned her monument, with effigies, in Bacton Church; the inscription which she composed states 'with a maiden queen a maid did end my life', prime evidence that both she and the queen were virgins. This monument is nationally important as it is the first depiction of Queen Elizabeth as Gloriana. However, Blanche died almost certainly at Westminster and was buried in Saint Margaret's Church adjacent to Westminster Abbey where her tomb effigy can be seen. Blanche left liberal legacies and charitable bequests (her Final Will was first privately printed, 1845, by Sir Thomas Phillips); £28 is still paid annually to the parishioners of Bacton and Newton. Blanche's religious opinions seem to have echoed the queen's preference for ceremonial, though there are indications of a residual Lollard influence in Blanche's family (there were connections to Sir John Oldcastle).

Blanche Parry touches Welsh historiography at one point. [Sir Edward Stradling](#), on [Lord Burghley's](#) suggestion, had written a tractate on the Norman conquest of Glamorgan, and had sent it to him. [Burghley](#) passed it to Blanche - for the queen to see. When [David Powel](#) was in London, probably to see about printing his [Historie](#), Blanche Parry handed [Stradling's](#) work to him - [Powel](#) describes 'the right worshipfull Mistres Blanch Parry,' as 'a singular well willer and furtherer of the weale publike' of Wales. [Powel](#) printed the tractate in full in his [Historie](#) - see [G. J. Williams, Traddodiad Llenyddol Morgannwg](#) (1948), 197-9. This adds further support to the circumstantial evidence that Blanche may have helped to finance the printing of the Welsh [Bible](#) in 1588.

Blanche Parry was at the centre of the Elizabethan Court and was the person in closest contact with the queen for the longest period of time. Her position was unassailable and was recognised by everyone at the time - it is evident that even confidential matters were discussed in front of her. Her friendship with her cousin [Lord Burghley](#) was an important factor in his own relationship with the queen. Blanche was meticulous, utterly dependable, discreet and totally devoted to Elizabeth. In a court described by Sir Anthony Denny as 'a place so slippery' (*Letters of Roger Ascham*, edited Alvin Vos, 1989) Blanche retained respect to the extent that when she died Thomas Markham opined that 'blind she was here on earth but I hope the joys in heaven she shall see.' Her monument, and an altar cloth fashioned from an Elizabethan Court dress, in Bacton Church and her tomb effigy in Saint Margaret's Westminster can still be seen. At least one of the suggested pictures is certainly of Blanche though it is only known from a photograph.

Authors

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Ruth Elizabeth Richardson

Sources

C. A. Bradford, *Blanche Parry, Queen Elizabeth's Gentlewoman* (London 1935)

Catalogue of Printed Literature in the Welsh Department, Cardiff Free Libraries (1898)

Ruth E. Richardson, *Mistress Blanche, Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante* (Eardisley 2018)

other references in the text above

www.blancheparity.com has additional information

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Blanche Parry](#)

Additional Links

VIAF: [68734245](#)

Wikidata: [Q3403111](#)

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