

A 'conservative' family? The Howard women and responses to religious change during the early Reformation, c. 1530-1558¹

The effect of Henry VIII's Reformation on the religious identities of the English people has justifiably taxed historians for a considerable time, since there can be few more important questions if we are to fully understand the political and social landscapes of the latter part of Henry's reign and beyond.² In a period that saw the established religious model wrenched apart, and the polity forced to negotiate their individual responses to the change, it is important that due consideration is given to the religious choices of the people closest to the heart of government; people such as the Howards, Dukes of Norfolk. The Howards' position as one of the largest, wealthiest, and most politically-involved noble dynasties makes them ideal subjects for exploration of the interplay between the aristocratic dynasty, politics, and religious change. Traditionally, the family is collectively understood as religiously 'conservative' across the sixteenth century, resisting the reformist impulse of the Reformation while conforming to the royal supremacy over the Church.³ Within the

¹ The author would like to thank Michael Questier, James Daybell, Anna Whitelock and Alden Gregory for their comments on earlier versions of this article, and Clive Burgess, Simon Healy, Neil Younger, Jessica Lutkin, Hannes Kleineke and Jo Edge for helpful discussion on various topics included.

² See, for instance, P. Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII's England* (Aldershot, 2006); E. H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003). On evangelicals, see A. Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003); A. Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2013); P. Marshall and A. Ryrie, eds., *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002); D. MacCulloch, *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (New York, 1999). On conservatives and/or Catholics, see P. O'Grady, *Henry VIII and the Conforming Catholics* (Collegeville (MN), 1990); Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 1993); L. Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2000); E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, 2005); E. H. Shagan, ed., *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation': Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2005); Michael Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 2006). On relations between them, see Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester, 2006); N. Lewycky and A. Morton, eds., *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England – Essays in Honour of Professor W. J. Sheils* (Aldershot, 2012).

³ The religious groupings that emerged during the 1530s and 40s had yet to attain the clarity exhibited during the reigns of Henry's children, and this makes it extremely difficult to define the beliefs of any Henrician individual. This article does not propose to rehash the semantics. The currently prevailing term 'evangelical' will be used here to describe those who not only supported the break with Rome and the royal supremacy, but pursued a reformist agenda beyond this. 'Conservative' will be used to denote those whom Marshall has termed the 'non-evangelical mainstream of English Christians', who maintained a traditional standpoint on the details of Catholic worship whether or not they conformed to the royal supremacy. See P. Marshall, 'The Naming of Protestant England', *Past & Present* 214 (2012), 87-128, and 'Is the Pope Catholic? Henry VIII and the Semantics of Schism', in Shagan, *Catholics and the 'Protestant Nation'*, pp. 22-48. The characterisation of the Howard dynasty as religious conservatives is pervasive. See, for instance, D. Starkey, *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII* (2004); Lacey Baldwin Smith, *Catherine Howard* (Stroud, repr. 2010); D. MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors* (Woodbridge, 1986); K. Stöber, *Late Medieval Monasteries and their Patrons: England and Wales, c. 1300-1540* (Woodbridge, 2007); R. Bucholz and N. Key, *Early Modern England 1485-1714: A Narrative History* (2009), p. 108; A. Whitelock, *Mary Tudor: England's First Queen* (2009), p. 105; Stephen Alford, *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 167; Hilary M. Larkin, *The Making of Englishmen: Debates on National Identity 1550-1650*

field of Tudor political history itself, the family patriarch, Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk, is usually placed squarely at the head of the ‘conservative faction’ and this has coloured historians’ impression of the rest of the dynasty.⁴ As remains the case in scholarship on the Tudor aristocracy, the women of the family are not generally considered in discussions of the Howards during the Reformation.

This article argues that they should be, the more so since the Howard dynasty boasted a large number of female members. The best-known of these are the two Howard queens, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, discussed here in familial context. Also under consideration are the two early sixteenth-century duchesses of Norfolk, Agnes Tylney-Howard, widow of the second Duke of Norfolk (d. 1545) and Elizabeth Stafford-Howard, wife and widow of the third Duke (d. 1558); Agnes’ daughters Anne Howard-de Vere, dowager Countess of Oxford (d. 1559) and Katherine Howard-ap Rhys-Daubeney, Countess of Bridgwater (d. 1554); and Elizabeth’s daughter Mary Howard-Fitzroy, dowager Duchess of Richmond (d. c. 1555). These women lived through the key early stages of the Reformation, cover three different generations, and provide the best evidence of responses to religious change, much of which has gone unnoticed. They also belong to a group not often discussed in this context. There is a distinct lack of scholarship on aristocratic religious identities, yet the nobility was intimately involved with the implementation of the Reformation, and the public context in which they lived meant that their religious choices were of unavoidably public significance. Despite this, the aristocracy as a whole tend to be presented as spiritually static and unchanging, and both individuals and whole dynasties are often anachronistically labelled ‘conservative’ or ‘evangelical’.⁵ This is in direct contrast with other recent work on religious identities of the lower social orders, which places a strong emphasis on the fluidity of religious beliefs across this period.⁶

Equally, though there has been considerable interest in women’s religious roles across the sixteenth century, this has not generally extended to the aristocracy. Where it has, it tends to focus on significant individuals rather than familial groups, since it is generally assumed that women’s religion was ruled by the family patriarch despite some evidence to the contrary.⁷ Work on women of lower classes, however, has emphasised their centrality to the family’s religious identity through means as diverse as control of the family kitchen, which allowed women to dictate the

(Leiden, 2013), p. 116; John Guy, *The Tudors: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000); Maurice Howard, *The Tudor Image* (1996), p. 38.

⁴ Notably in what remains the standard biography, D. Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: The Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (1995). Michael Graves in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter ODNB] has called him ‘conservative in religion and consistently hostile to the reformed faith’. For Alec Ryrie, Norfolk was ‘England’s leading lay conservative’; for Diarmaid MacCulloch, ‘the lay embodiment of traditional religion.’ Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII*, p. 213; MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (1996), p. 243.

⁵ See n. 3 above, and also Steven Gunn, *Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, c. 1484-1545* (Oxford, 1988), Joseph S. Block, *Factional Politics and the English Reformation, 1520-1540* (Oxford, 1993). A noteworthy exception is P. Marshall and G. Scott, eds., *Catholic Gentry in English Society: The Throckmortons of Coughton from Reformation to Emancipation* (Aldershot, 2009).

⁶ See, for instance, Shagan, *Popular Politics*.

⁷ Such as Melissa Franklin-Harkrider, *Women, Reform and Community in Early Modern England: Katherine Willoughby, duchess of Suffolk, and Lincolnshire’s Godly Aristocracy, 1519-1580* (Woodbridge, 2008); Pauline Croft, ed., *Patronage, Culture and Power: The Early Cecils 1558-1612* (New Haven, 2002); Retha Warnicke, *Wicked Women of Tudor England* (Basingstoke, 2012). A recent and welcome exception is Gemma Allen, *The Cooke Sisters: Education, Piety and Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2013).

mechanics of religious fasting, and maintenance of like-minded religious networks.⁸ If the aristocracy and women are important to the study of the Reformation as separate entities, aristocratic women's responses to religious change must surely be worth investigating.

This article therefore takes the view that an understanding of the religious choices of the family's women is vital if we are to understand the religious, and therefore political, position of the Howard family as a dynastic whole. New archival research, encompassing religious and cultural patronage, appointments to benefices, personal chaplains, and wills allows us to ask what the Howard women's responses to religious change were and whether they displayed clear religious identities at any point during this period. In doing so it challenges the prevailing view of the Howards as religious conservatives, revealing that the family covered a number of different positions across the religious spectrum, but nevertheless managed to remain broadly conformist, a concept dissected in the conclusion. What were the motivations behind these choices; did the demands of kinship override those of conscience or vice versa? It is argued here that we can and should discuss the aristocratic response to religious change as distinct from the rest of the population, and that there may be a gendered element within this.

II

Of the Howard women, the best-known are undoubtedly the two Howard Queens, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, and there has been considerable debate about their religious beliefs. The larger discussion concerning Anne's religion has focused not only on what her beliefs were, but on the level of influence she exerted on the Reformation in general.⁹ Given the amount of expert treatment elsewhere, I do not propose to rehash the latter here, but instead to set Anne's religion in the context of the rest of her family.

Most historians support the identification of Anne's beliefs as 'evangelical' or 'reformist', emphasising her ownership of evangelical books by authors such as William Tyndale, her patronage of continental reformers such as Nicholas Bourbon, and contemporary views of her later immortalised by John Foxe and William Latimer. The latter authors' literary portraits of Anne, published during her daughter's reign, are sometimes dismissed as Protestant propaganda intended to steer Elizabeth I into further religious reform. There is no denying that this was among their aims. However, Freeman has argued that much of Foxe's portrayal comes directly from contemporaries who knew Anne and can be corroborated by other sources, showing that there was a 'widespread perception' of Anne as 'a devout and important promoter

⁸ C. Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2003), and P. Crawford, *Women and Religion in Early Modern England 1500-1720* (Oxford, 1999). See also the considerable literature on women and recusant networks, beginning with Marie B. Rowlands, 'Recusant women 1560-1640' in Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (1985), pp. 149-80.

⁹ M. Dowling, 'Anne Boleyn and reform', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 35 (1984), 30-46; G. Bernard, 'Anne Boleyn's religion', *Historical Journal*, 36.1 (1993), 1-20; E. Ives, 'Anne Boleyn and the early Reformation in England: the contemporary evidence', *Historical Journal*, 37.2 (1994), 389-408; T. S. Freeman, 'Research, rumour and propaganda: Anne Boleyn in Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995). Ives' and Bernard's arguments were revisited in their respective books, *'The Most Happy': The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (Oxford, 2004) and *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions* (New Haven, 2010).

of the gospel'.¹⁰ The first version of his martyrology was, indeed, written in a Howard household. This was Mary, Duchess of Richmond, a former lady-in-waiting of Anne's and also her cousin, who gave Foxe anecdotes about Anne's charity in the late 1540s or early 1550s before there can have been a widespread move to rehabilitate her reputation.¹¹ Foxe's reports of her charity, her promotion of reformist clergy, and how she kept an English bible in her chamber for her household to peruse at leisure all support the interpretation of Anne as a reformer.

On the other hand, George Bernard has argued that Anne was in fact more Erasmian in her tastes, a proponent of an aesthetic strain of Catholicism rather than self-consciously 'evangelical'.¹² Much of this argument is semantic in that it rests on the way in which we define 'evangelical'. Since Bernard and others use subtly different definitions, both interpretations are, in a sense, correct. Bernard argues that it should be used to mean somebody who 'was opening the floodgates to the ideas of Martin Luther or Huldrych Swingli' and was a believer in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and points out that contemporaries – specifically Thomas More – used it in this sense.¹³ He therefore sees Anne's words and actions during her last days as evidence that she was a traditional Catholic, since she asked for the sacrament, spent time praying before it, and evinced a belief in the efficacy of good deeds.¹⁴ He also points out that she refused the dedication of a book denying the sacrifice of the mass in 1536.¹⁵ However, as Freeman points out, contemporaries perceived a clear difference between early evangelicals, who continued to defend the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and sacramentaries, who did not, so Anne's behaviour here is unremarkable.¹⁶ Bernard may be right to argue that the word 'evangelical' is used loosely by historians, but it was also used to mean different things by contemporaries at different times.¹⁷ That those around her believed Anne to have been a reformer strongly suggests that we should also see her in this light.

Anne's case is also worth discussing from the point of view of the relationship between religious and political alignments, since this too has impacted our understanding of the Howard family. Historians have tended to turn this into an 'either/or' situation. Anne's support for the royal supremacy is sometimes seen as purely political, because by that point it had become the only way for her to marry Henry and become Queen; a sort of 'she would, wouldn't she'.¹⁸ There may well be truth to this. But it does not mean she cannot also have had the genuine religious belief and opinion she regularly expressed, and which contemporaries believed she espoused. Conversely, where Anne is sometimes refused religious sentiment in favour of political ambition, her supporters are given religious motivations that they did not themselves express. It tends to be assumed that Anne's supporters were self-evidently evangelicals, and Catherine of Aragon's, conservatives.¹⁹ I do not think this was

¹⁰ Freeman, p. 801.

¹¹ *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* [hereafter TAMO] (1583 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) Book 8, p. 1078, available from <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [accessed 12.03.15].

¹² Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, pp. 92-124.

¹³ Bernard, 'Anne Boleyn's religion', pp. 97-8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁵ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, p. 107.

¹⁶ Freeman, p. 818.

¹⁷ Marshall, 'The naming of Protestant England'.

¹⁸ Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions*, pp. 109-111; Ives, pp. 277-79; Warnicke, pp. 31-2.

¹⁹ See, for instance, essays in David Starkey, ed., *Rivals in Power: The Lives and Letters of the Great Tudor Dynasties* (1990).

always quite so straightforward and nor do contemporaries express allegiances in these terms. Norfolk, for example, consistently supported Anne (though later denied this), but we would struggle to call him an evangelical. Anne's aunt Katherine Howard-ap Rhys, Lady Rhys, and her husband Sir Rhys ap Griffith were reported in 1531 as having 'spoken disparagingly' of Anne.²⁰ There is no indication in the source that this was anything but political; historians, not contemporaries, have inferred a religious element.²¹ Norfolk's wife, Elizabeth Stafford-Howard, is well-known as a supporter of Catherine of Aragon in the face of her husband's displeasure, and thus it is assumed that she must have been a religious conservative. In fact, none of the many contemporary references to Elizabeth's support for Catherine mention religion, and we do not know what Elizabeth's views on the break with Rome were.²² The implication is rather that her support for Catherine was based on lengthy personal service.²³ This, indeed, shows that there was no Howard 'faction' working coherently in support of Anne Boleyn during this period, but it also shows that the motivations behind these kind of alignments were not straightforward, and need to be approached with the same level of caution whether we are talking about Anne or about those around her.

The religion of Catherine Howard, Henry's fifth queen and Anne Boleyn's first cousin, has received considerably less attention. This is partly because there is less available evidence for what her beliefs may have been, but also partly because for a long time it was assumed that she was, if not a religious conservative herself, at least a pawn of the 'conservative faction' led by her uncle Norfolk and Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, who are supposed to have connived to place her on the throne to achieve conservative ascendancy.²⁴ However, Catherine's conservatism is far less certain. On the one hand, she is known to have actively befriended Thomas Cranmer, and her household contained such evangelicals as Edward Baynton, her Vice-Chamberlain.²⁵ On the other, she also pleaded with Henry for the lives of conservatives Sir John Wallop and John Mason.²⁶ MacCulloch is therefore correct when he states that Catherine appears not to have led or been involved in any religious faction, and that her fall was not an evangelical victory against the conservatives.²⁷

Away from the Howard queens the religious activities of Norfolk's daughter Mary Howard-Fitzroy, Duchess of Richmond, provide the strongest evidence for non-conservative responses to the Reformation among the Howards and of religious agency among aristocratic women during this period. Mary is known to historians as the patroness of the martyrologist John Foxe and author John Bale, and is thus remembered as a staunch evangelical.²⁸ Where the late 1540s and early 1550s are

²⁰ *CSP Spanish*, IV, ii, 853.

²¹ See Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, Reorientation and Reformation: Wales c. 1415-1642* (Oxford, 1987), p. 256; W. Llewelyn Williams, 'A Welsh Insurrection', *Y Cymmrodor* 16 (1902), 1-94 (p. 11).

²² *LP* IV, 6738; *LP* V, 70, 216, 238 *LP* VI, 585.

²³ One source stated that she refused to attend Anne Boleyn's coronation in 1533 'from the love she bore to the previous queen'. *LP* VI, 585.

²⁴ Smith, p. 109; Starkey, p. 649, 654.

²⁵ MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, p. 272. On Baynton, see Swensen, 'Patronage from the Privy Chamber: Sir Anthony Denny and religious reform', *Journal of British Studies* 27 (1988), 25-44.

²⁶ *LP* XVI, 678 (41).

²⁷ MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer*, pp. 288-9.

²⁸ See Beverley A. Murphy, 'Mary [née Howard] Fitzroy (c. 1519-?1555)', *ODNB* [accessed 12.03.15]; John N. King, 'Patronage and Piety: The Influence of Catherine Parr' in Margaret P. Hannay, ed., *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Ohio, 1985), pp. 43-60; S. James, *Catherine Parr: Henry VIII's Last Love* (Stroud, 2009), p. 199; S. Brigden,

concerned I do not propose to argue with this. But, like many nobles who emerged as reformers during Edward's reign, Mary did not suddenly materialise fully formed in the late 1540s. She had in fact been a shining light of the royal court since the early 1530s, and is an important example of the way in which new beliefs could develop over time. The specific date-range of her more overt activities also raises questions about the way in which women's religious beliefs interacted with considerations of family and politics.

Mary was born c. 1519 which meant that she had never participated as an adult in the pre-royal supremacy church.²⁹ It is logical to assume that she first encountered evangelical beliefs while serving in the household of her cousin Anne Boleyn during the 1530s, and as we saw earlier, she later provided John Foxe with anecdotes of Anne's bountiful almsgiving, suggesting that she was perhaps a part of these practices.³⁰ Nonetheless, there is no evidence of a particularly close relationship between the two women; they did not form a coherent evangelical 'party' within the Howard dynasty. Indeed, Mary's networks show that the religious parties that are said to have characterised the late 1530s and 1540s were not a strong feature any earlier. Mary was part of the literary circle that produced what is now known as the Devonshire Manuscript, a Tudor miscellany of verse into which friends (notably the King's niece Lady Margaret Douglas and Mary Shelton) wrote copies of poems, original compositions, and annotations during the 1530s.³¹ What is interesting about Mary's involvement here is that this circle of friends included individuals who would later espouse very different religious beliefs. Mary appears to have been especially close to the King's niece Lady Margaret Douglas. She was among the very few who knew about Margaret's clandestine marriage to Lord Thomas Howard in 1533, and in 1541 Margaret went with Mary to Kenninghall when the King required her lodging at Syon House to hold Catherine Howard.³² However, where Mary later patronised evangelical writers, Margaret used her house at Temple Newsam in Yorkshire to host recusant priests.³³ The contents of the Devonshire Manuscript have never been analysed for what, if anything, they might tell us about religious developments at court, but the identities of the major contributors emphasise that Mary certainly found it possible to enjoy close friendships with people who would later take very different religious paths.

Mary was widowed unexpectedly in 1536 without having consummated her marriage to Henry Fitzroy. Widowhood was often a positive life-change for aristocratic women as it tended to leave them wealthy, no longer under coverture (and thus able to administer their own lands and lawsuits), and with the freedom to run their own household while holding an honoured position within the family networks.³⁴

'Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and the 'Conjured League'', *Historical Journal* 37 (1994), 507-37; Franklin-Harkrider, pp. 62, 77-8.

²⁹ For more on generational responses see Jones, *The English Reformation*, pp. 1-6.

³⁰ Mary made her first official court appearance carrying Anne's train at her creation as Marquess of Pembroke in 1533 (BL Add. MS 6113, fol. 70). *TAMO* (1583 edition), Book 8, p. 1078 [Accessed: 17.03.15].

³¹ BL Add. MS 17492, printed as *The Devonshire Manuscript: A Women's Book of Courtly Poetry, Lady Margaret Douglas and Others*, edited and introduced by E. Heale (Toronto, 2012).

³² TNA E36/120/65; TNA SP1/167, fol. 123v.

³³ R. K. Marshall, 'Lady Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox (1515-1578)', *ODNB* [accessed 16/05/14].

³⁴ For debate on the status of early modern widows, see the introduction to Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner, eds., *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (1999). See also Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 127-174.

Mary got none of these things. The King, her father-in-law, refused to pay her jointure, plunging her into debt.³⁵ Still legally a minor at only seventeen, she returned to a position of dependence in her father Norfolk's household at Kenninghall, though he did not, apparently, support her financially.³⁶ This change in personal circumstances may have had an impact on Mary's response to religious change. It is not clear at this point how far her beliefs differed from her father's, if at all, and there is no evidence of religious animosity between them. As Beverley Murphy has rightly pointed out, we should not imagine Mary in deepest East Anglian isolation during this time. She was in attendance at court as one of Anne of Cleves' Great Ladies in 1539, and as an occasional 'extraordinary' lady-in-waiting to Catherine Howard and Katherine Parr.³⁷ She visited friends in London, dining often with the Seymours, and a 1545 dispensation for herself and two guests at her table to eat meat during Lent and other prohibited times shows that she entertained company.³⁸ She therefore had ample opportunity to develop her spiritual ideas even while nominally under her father's conservative roof. Mary has often been identified as one of the tight circle of evangelical noblewomen surrounding Katherine Parr during the 1540s.³⁹ She knew these women, certainly, and would later undertake similar kinds of evangelical patronage at similar levels, but she was not among the Queen's resident ladies-in-waiting, and received no more gifts or attention than other non-resident noblewomen during this period.⁴⁰ Neither was she one of the small group of women – all of the Queen's inner circle – to be incriminated in the heresy case of the evangelical Anne Askew in 1546. If Mary was an active evangelical during these years, it is surprising that we do not find her more often among Katherine Parr's women, and this suggests she was not yet at the forefront of these circles. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that Mary's beliefs were developing. In the deposition she gave for her brother Surrey's treason trial in 1546, Mary told her questioners how he had tried to dissuade her from 'going too far' in reading the Scripture.⁴¹ It seems most likely that this is a reference to Mary reading the bible herself in English, something her father had declared he never had and never would do.⁴² Yet apparently this caused no discernable problems between father and daughter.

The arrest of Norfolk and Surrey for high treason in 1546 was followed swiftly by Surrey's execution. This altered Mary's circumstances yet again, and in this light it is noteworthy that Edward VI's reign saw a sudden increase in Mary's evangelical activity. Once it became clear that Norfolk would remain imprisoned for the foreseeable future, Mary was given custody of his grandchildren, her brother

³⁵ *LP XIX*, ii, 690; *LP XX*, i, 624 (15); *LP XXI*, i, 1383 (110), p. 776; TNA SP1/227, fol. 84.

³⁶ The valuation of Richmond's material goods (BL Royal MS. 7 F. xiv, fol. 83v onwards, printed as John Gough Nichols, ed., *Inventories of the Wardrobes, Plate, Chapel Stuff Etc. of Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, and of the Wardrobe Stuff at Baynard's Castle of Katherine, Princess Dowager*, Camden Miscellany III (London, 1855)) states that Mary was given horses 'to convey her into Norfolk'. Royal commissioners in 1546 described her chamber as 'soo bare as your maiestie wolle hardlie think her juells suche as she hadd solde...to paie her debtes' (TNA SP1/227, fol. 84).

³⁷ Beverley A. Murphy, *Bastard Prince: Henry VIII's Lost Son* (Stroud, 2001), p. 230. For evidence of Mary's court visits see TNA SP1/155, fol. 21v; BL Cotton MS Vespasian C XIV, fol. 107v.

³⁸ Brigden, p. 525; *Faculty Office Register 1534-1549* ed by D. S. Chambers (Oxford, 1966), p. 254.

³⁹ King, 'Patronage and Piety'; James, p. 199; Franklin-Harkrider, p. 62.

⁴⁰ She received a stag from the Queen in 1544, and was listed as visiting the court in 1546. TNA SP1/195, fol. 173, BL Cotton MS Vespasian C XIV, fol. 107v.

⁴¹ E. Herbert, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *The Life and Reign of Henry the Eighth* (London, 1672), p. 627.

⁴² TNA SP1/163, fol. 38.

Surrey's children, for whom she employed John Foxe as tutor in 1548.⁴³ There can be no doubt that Mary knew exactly what kind of tutor she was employing, since Foxe's beliefs were well known. However, it is not clear that Foxe joined Mary's household immediately on a full-time basis as is usually assumed; the description of him in 1550 as 'moram faciens' – staying – within the household of Katherine Willoughby-Brandon, dowager Duchess of Suffolk, complicates this.⁴⁴ He was definitely in Mary's full-time employment from 1550 when the household moved out to Reigate, the home of Lord William Howard, where his son and heir Charles joined the schoolroom.⁴⁵ During this time Foxe openly began to write the first version of what would later be known as his *Book of Martyrs* and Mary provided him with anecdotal evidence of Anne Boleyn's charity.⁴⁶ Foxe also had considerable impact on his young charges, forging a lifelong bond with Thomas Howard, later 4th Duke of Norfolk. Howard allegedly helped Foxe to flee in to exile in 1553, and also gave him assistance on his return from exile at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. In his letters to Foxe he described him as 'my right loving schoolemaster'.⁴⁷

As well as Foxe, Mary also harboured John Bale on his return from exile in 1547 and thus facilitated their meeting.⁴⁸ Bale acted as go-between for her and the Protestant translator Nicholas Lesse, who described Bale as Mary's 'faithful and loving servant'.⁴⁹ Lesse's dedication of his translation of *St. Augustine's Twelve Steppes of Abuse* to Mary in 1550 states that Mary undertook such patronage because she was desirous for such works to 'come in to [the] handes of [the] people', and had 'ofte[n] times... com[mun]ed' with the radical printer John Day in order to achieve this; Day is actually described here as 'hers'.⁵⁰ The evangelical writer Thomas Becon also dedicated a collection of prayers, 'The Castell of Comforte', likewise printed by Day, to Mary around the same time.⁵¹

Nor did Mary confine her patronage to writers. In 1549 she wrote to Secretary of State Sir Thomas Smith to ask him to speak to Protector Somerset for royal licenses to allow Dr King of Norwich, Thomas Some (or Solme), and John Huntingdon to preach.⁵² The latter two had reputations as radical evangelicals and all three had already been given what were presumably licenses of less authority by

⁴³ *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward VI*, IV, p. 237; Tom Freeman, 'John Foxe: a biography', *TAMO* [accessed 03.02.15]; Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas Freeman, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 36-52.

⁴⁴ Ordination book of Nicholas Ridley, printed verbatim in W. H. Frere, *The Marian Reaction in its relation to the English clergy* (London, 1896), pp. 181-210. See also Brett Usher, 'Foxe in London, 1550-87', *TAMO* [accessed 13.03.15].

⁴⁵ Reigate was granted to Lord William Howard in 1550 (H. E. Malden (ed.), *A History of the County of Surrey: Volume 3*, www.british-history.ac.uk [accessed 3 February 2013]). It is an interesting comment on Lord William's own beliefs that he was prepared to allow his son and heir to be tutored by the unequivocally evangelical Foxe, and to harbour Foxe and Mary in his own household.

⁴⁶ His *Commentarii rerum in ecclesia gestarum*, published in Strasbourg in 1554. See Evenden and Freeman, p. 52.

⁴⁷ BL Harleian MS 417, fol. 115v. See also Evenden and Freeman, pp. 53-4.

⁴⁸ J. N. King, 'John Bale (1495-1563)', *ODNB* [accessed 16.05.14].

⁴⁹ Nicholas Lesse (trans.), *The twelfe steppes of abuses write[n] by the famos doctor S. Augustine translated out of laten by Nicolas Lesse*, *EEBO* [accessed 03.02.15], dedication (p. 3-4).

⁵⁰ See 'Fitzroy (Howard), Mary', in F. B. Williams, Jr., *Index of Dedications and Commendatory Verses in English Books before 1641* (1962); Lesse, pp. 3-4; E. Elizabeth Evenden, *Patents, Pictures and Patronage: John Day and the Tudor Book Trade* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 24.

⁵¹ Williams, *Index of Dedications*.

⁵² TNA SP10/7, no. 1.

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury.⁵³ Smith evidently responded negatively towards Huntingdon, as Mary then wrote in no uncertain terms demanding that he withdraw his ‘evell opynion’, stating that ‘I am assured he is not only off a godly commorsarye but allso wt lerneynge & eloquens abell to edyfy his audytory’.⁵⁴ To write such a letter was a clear and public statement of Mary’s own faith and an example of her determination to have her own way regarding it. Mary’s religious agency during this period is underappreciated. She was not simply passively receiving dedications from Protestant writers, but had John Foxe writing what would arguably become the most influential Protestant text of the early modern period in her household. She was actively working with printers to secure the publishing of reformist literature, while educating the next generation of Howards in the most reformist atmosphere it was possible to contrive against the probable wishes of her father, whose first action on release from the Tower in 1553 was to sack Foxe.⁵⁵ It is not surprising that historians have placed Mary within the most active, most influential group of evangelical aristocratic women during this period.

Her activity during Edward’s reign is all the more remarkable given the speed with which it flowered. Within a year Mary hired Bale and Foxe, demanded patronage for preachers, made acquaintance with printers like Day, and put them to good use. Is this because her beliefs had suddenly radicalised, or because she was suddenly free to exercise them in more practical ways? Since there is evidence of evangelical sentiment towards the end of Henry VIII’s reign and we know that she remained in touch with the royal court, the former seems unlikely. The latter – increased religious freedom – came about in two ways: Mary ceased to live under her father’s rule, and religious policy altered under Edward. Both are important, but the former may have the edge. Religious policy did not officially alter under Edward until 1549 but Mary was active before this time, and was in fact skating on thin ice by patronising John Huntingdon even by Edwardian standards.⁵⁶ It does not appear that Henrician religious policy held her back or that Edwardian policy pushed her forward. Instead running her own household as an independent widow seems to have been the spur to Mary’s sudden religious flowering.

When with the coming of the Marian regime Norfolk was released from prison. Mary lost her independence and correspondingly disappears from the historical record, suggesting she ceased all her former activities as swiftly as she had begun them. Norfolk immediately sacked Foxe, placing his eldest charge, Thomas Howard, under the tutelage of Stephen Gardiner, and the younger son Henry within the household of staunch Catholic John White, bishop of Lincoln; unequivocally conservative choices.⁵⁷ Foxe fled into exile shortly after this, as did many of Mary’s other evangelical protégées and a significant number of aristocratic female contemporaries.⁵⁸ Mary did not, remaining once again under her father’s roof and rule. This is surprising, but was probably because she had neither the support of a

⁵³ See W. R. D. Jones, ‘Thomas Solme [Some]’, *ODNB* [accessed 16.05.14], and ‘John Huntingdon’, *TAMO* [accessed 16.05.14].

⁵⁴ TNA SP10/7, no. 3. Ian Archer states that Smith had a reputation for being religiously lukewarm, blunt, and not very personable (Archer, ‘Sir Thomas Smith (1513-1577)’, *ODNB* [accessed 16.05.14]). Mary’s tone is probably also a reflection of the difference in their statuses.

⁵⁵ Freeman, ‘John Foxe’, *TAMO* [accessed 13.03.15].

⁵⁶ For an outline of religious policy changes see Duffy, *Stripping the Altars*.

⁵⁷ Freeman, ‘John Foxe’, *TAMO* [accessed 13.03.15]; Graves, ‘Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk’, *ODNB* [accessed 16.05.14].

⁵⁸ John Foxe, John Bale, Thomas Becon, John Huntingdon, and possibly Thomas Some all fled into exile on the continent after 1553. So did Katherine Willoughby-Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk.

husband nor the financial capital to attempt such a move, given her continual pleas for money during the previous reign.⁵⁹ Mary did not attend the coronation and nothing more is heard of her until her death in 1555.

Despite the fact that Norfolk's presence seems to have been a major factor in Mary's inability to express her evangelical beliefs, there was no apparent animosity between them. Though she spent Edward's reign educating his grandchildren in a way he would not have approved of, she also spent it visiting Norfolk in the Tower and badgering the Council for his release.⁶⁰ He in turn left her five hundred pounds in his will for the pains she had taken.⁶¹ This does not suggest a family riven by religious differences; rather, it supports recent research showing that families divided by ideology could still enjoy functional relationships across these divides.

Evidence for the beliefs of the rest of the Howard women is thinner on the ground, but nonetheless illuminating in patches. Katherine, Countess of Bridgwater, spoke up in support of Richard Whiting, Abbot of Glastonbury, in a letter to Cromwell in 1535, describing him as 'a good relligious mane'.⁶² Throughout the 1530s the elderly Whiting earned the especial enmity of Thomas Cromwell, and was executed in 1539 on a trumped-up charge of treason. Although he and the rest of his house had taken the Oath of Supremacy in 1534, nevertheless the abbey continued to be micromanaged and when Katherine wrote in October 1535 injunctions had recently been passed restricting Whiting's personal movements.⁶³ Katherine's plea was made in a postscript to a letter concerning her own suit for help to dissolve her unhappy marriage to Henry Daubeney, Earl of Bridgwater. In this light it was arguably unwise to weigh in on behalf of a man who had incurred her patron's displeasure. That she did so, and moreover that she went to the length of describing him as 'a good religious man' makes it likely that her sympathy was not only for the man but for his beliefs.

Anne, dowager Countess of Oxford, born c. 1497, was in her thirties when the Reformation began and had been a widow since 1526, living primarily at Castle Camps in Cambridgeshire. Her marriage, to John de Vere, 14th Earl of Oxford, had not been a happy one and Anne had had particular support from her half brother Thomas, third Duke of Norfolk, during the 1520s.⁶⁴ Their closeness extended into their religious activities post-Reformation. In 1538, Anne became involved alongside Norfolk in the eradication of evangelical preaching in East Anglia. According to a letter written by Thomas Dorset, vicar of St Margaret's Lothbury, London, to the Mayor of Plymouth in 1536, 'one Lambert' – John Lambert, formerly Nicholson – 'was detect of heresy' for declaring that it was a sin to pray to saints.⁶⁵ The detection, according to Dorset, had come from the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Essex, and Anne, the dowager Countess of Oxford, who had collectively written to three different bishops about Lambert. Dorset stated that 'men suppose they handelid hym so to

⁵⁹ TNA SP10/14, nos. 45 and 53.

⁶⁰ *Acts of the Privy Council*, ed. by John Roche Dasent (HM Stationery Office, 1890), vol. 2, p. 400.

⁶¹ See Marshall and Scott, *Catholic Gentry*.

⁶² TNA SP1/97, fols. 120-120v.

⁶³ *LP IX*, 685.

⁶⁴ Anne was married to John de Vere, 14th Earl of Oxford, in 1512. Once the Earl reached his majority in 1520 things went rapidly downhill as he failed to manage his estate or treat Anne with any courtesy. Norfolk and Wolsey became involved, and the matter culminated in a Chancery ordinance designed to keep his behaviour in check. See SP1/27, fols. 149-56, and Henry Ellis, 'Copy of an Order made by Cardinal Wolsey, as Lord Chancellor, respecting the Management of the Affairs of the young Earl of Oxford', *Archaeologia* 19 (1821), 62-5.

⁶⁵ BL Cotton MS Cleopatra E IV, fol. 110.

please them [Norfolk, Essex, and Anne] to grate favor'.⁶⁶ These three were certainly three of the biggest fish among the East Anglian elite and the two men were perhaps also the most conservative.⁶⁷ That Anne joined them, thus actively maintaining the tradition of praying to saints in 1538, suggests she may have been religiously conservative too.

II

Another key form of patronage providing an insight into these women's responses to religious change across the early Reformation period is their appointments of clergy to benefices. After all, the influence of a parish priest within the local community could be considerable, and it has been posited that in some areas the priest's own response to religious change could affect the direction of the entire region.⁶⁸ If this is true for a single priest, how much more so for his patron, who held the rights to other benefices in the locality and further afield? Unsurprisingly, studies have shown that patrons were aware of this, and that identifying the clergymen whom a patron chose to sponsor can therefore reveal much about his or her own religious inclinations.⁶⁹ The lengthy widowhoods of many of the Howard women during these years ought in theory to make it easier to trace their patronage in this regard, because during widowhood women not only held advowsons in their own right, but made appointments under their own names rather than being subsumed within a husband's patronage. However, tracing the ownership of advowsons can be a tricky business, since they did not always descend in linear fashion along with a manor or estate.⁷⁰ Even more pertinently, the survival rate for bishop's registers, which document institutions to benefices, is low across a number of dioceses for this period. This has meant that systematic analysis of appointments to benefices is only truly possible for one of the women under discussion here: Anne Howard-de Vere, Countess of Oxford, a widow from 1526 until her death in 1558.

Anne's jointure from the de Veres was large – twenty-two manors, the residue of two more, and reversion of another three.⁷¹ Of the twenty-two, five definitely included the rights to the advowson, while six definitely did not, and the remaining eleven are doubtful or unknown.⁷² Numerically this was a reasonable number of advowsons for a widowed noblewoman to possess; for instance, Franklin-Harkrider

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Other candidates might have been John de Vere, fifteenth Earl of Oxford, but he was 'reputedly Protestant' (Jonathan Hughes, *ODNB*); Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, was similarly relaxed in religion (Gunn, Charles Brandon). Norfolk we know was reasonably conservative, and Gunn describes Essex as conservative, though not 'passionately so'. (*ODNB*).

⁶⁸ David Crankshaw, 'Chaplains to the Elizabethan nobility: activities, categories and patterns', in Hugh Adlington, Tom Lockwood and Gillian Wrights, eds., *Chaplains in Early Modern England: Patronage, Literature and Religion* (Manchester, 2013), pp. 36-63 (p. 37).

⁶⁹ See David Crankshaw's work on the religious patronage of the Elizabethan nobility. See also discussions of Lady Anne Bacon's ecclesiastical patronage in Allen, pp. 167-201, and of Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, in Franklin-Harkrider, pp. 77-89.

⁷⁰ On the legal mechanics of advowsons, see Peter M. Smith, 'The Advowson: The History and Development of a Most Peculiar Property', *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 5:26 (2000), 320-339.

⁷¹ See *Statutes of the Realm*, III, pp. 413-4; TNA E41/220.

⁷² Anne's definite advowsons: Knapton in Norfolk, Castle Camps in Cambridgeshire, Calverton and Aston Sandford in Buckinghamshire, and Baddlesmere in Kent. See the relevant volumes of the *Victoria County History* [hereafter *VCH*] at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>, Francis Blomefield, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, 11 vols (1810) at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>, The Clergy of Church of England Database at <http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk> [hereafter CCED], and relevant episcopal registers for Norwich, Ely, London and Canterbury dioceses.

has worked out that in Lincolnshire sixteen women presented to benefices during this period but only six presented to multiple livings, and Allen states that Lady Bacon, held the rights to only two benefices during her widowhood.⁷³ Anne's were spread across Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and into Kent. She appointed to all of them several times across the 1530s, 40s, and 50s, making it possible to spot patterns where they occur.

A caution about the level of outside influence must be added. Nominally, Anne was in control. There is only one noted instance of her allowing someone else to present to one of her benefices, and this was for one turn only in 1558, right at the end of her life.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, we know that clergy appointments were very often made through personal recommendation, and the number of well-known, senior individuals who made it into Anne's benefices might well indicate this.⁷⁵ Kinship connections, indeed, undoubtedly played a role; William Hatch, appointed by Anne to Knapton in 1548, was later appointed to Gaywode in 1556 by Frances de Vere-Howard, Countess of Surrey, a relative of Anne's.⁷⁶ However, though we must bear this in mind, there is no conclusive evidence to show that any of Anne's appointments were specifically affected by recommendation, and in any case Anne's visible networks do not appear to have been of one religious dimension across this period.

While the surviving records for Anne's five benefices do show a complete list of incumbents from the late 1530s all the way to her death in 1558, for half of these priests all that survives is a name and date, and this gives no indication of religious persuasion. However, for those who are traceable a linear pattern of some kind does emerge. Those appointed in the 1530s and 40s give the least indication of religious direction. Richard Marvyn, appointed by Anne to her local parish church in Castle Camps, Cambridgeshire, in 1540, left sixteen dairy cows to his home parish of St Peter Mancroft in Norwich in 1543 'for a certen memorie to be wreten in the bed-roll booke, wherby the curate every Sunday shall reherse and pray for the sowles of the sayd Richard Marvyn and Jone his wyff, his father and mother, and John Tevell and all frends'.⁷⁷ William Cutler, however, rector of Knapton from 1529, wrote 'a book for ye Instruction of ignorant people' against the Bishop of Rome in 1536 and was sent by Anne to show it to Thomas Cromwell.⁷⁸ Though at first glance these might appear to suggest different religious objectives, the two are not necessarily contradictory. There is no reason why a priest who supported the royal supremacy during this period might not also continue to believe in the efficacy of prayers for the dead, or vice versa. A more reformist appointment was John Whitwell, who – if the same person, and we cannot be sure – was chaplain to Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, at the same time. Records show that he was among the stipendiary curates at Stony Stratford, sister parish to Calverton and probably under Anne's patronage, in 1540.⁷⁹

⁷³ Franklin-Harkrider, p. 89; Allen, p. 177.

⁷⁴ Calverton [Location ID 7102], CCED [accessed 13.03.15].

⁷⁵ Another Howard woman, Elizabeth Stafford-Howard, Duchess of Norfolk, mentioned in a letter of 1539 that she had a priest 'whiche was put to my s[er]vice by maistres Danyell whiche was my olde ladyes of northfolk gentyll woman' (TNA SP1/144, fol. 16). See also Claire Cross, ed., *Patronage and Recruitment in the Tudor and early Stuart Church* (York, 1996).

⁷⁶ Blomefield, 8 [accessed 31.03.15].

⁷⁷ Castle Camps [Location ID 883], CCED [accessed 13.03.15]; Blomefield, 4 [accessed 31/03/15].

⁷⁸ TNA SP1/113, fol. 151. Cutler was Rector of Knapton in Norfolk between 1529 and 1542 (Blomefield, 8, [accessed 13.03.15]). Cutler's letter states that he left the book with Dr Bellose. Nothing appears to have come of this; neither the book nor Cutler's description of it survive.

⁷⁹ Stony Stratford [Location ID 7251] CCED [accessed 13.03.15]; MacCulloch, p. 15, 284. Stony Stratford had formerly been part of the manor and parish of Calverton, to which Anne held the

Anne's personal chaplain Richard Pranke was also a feature of this period of her widowhood, holding four out of five of her benefices at various points across the 1540s. His will preamble of 1547 is brief and neutral, bequeathing his soul to Almighty God only.⁸⁰ What it shows is that Anne's choices during her early widowhood were generally neither overtly reformist, nor rigidly traditional, but might be described as that nebulous thing, 'Henrician Catholic'.

During Edward's reign, Anne's choices again appear to conform with religious policy, though perhaps with varying degrees of alacrity. William Roberts, appointed rector of Badlesmere, Kent, in 1552, renounced papal supremacy by proxy at the time of his appointment.⁸¹ She also appointed John Redman, the well-known theologian, to Calverton in 1548.⁸² He had been prominent during Henry VIII's reign, accepting the royal supremacy and serving on committees charged with drawing up articles for the King's Book of 1543, preparing a new translation of the Bible, and convincing Nicholas Shaxton to accept the Six Articles. He has been described as 'theologically compatible with the king [Henry VIII]' but served the Edwardian regime 'as best he could'.⁸³ Redman took the benefice of Calverton in 1548 after resigning his more exalted and presumably more financially rewarding position as Archdeacon of Stafford in 1547.⁸⁴ Could it be that Calverton, and Anne's patronage, provided a more congenial haven in the Edwardian religious climate?

The appointments that Anne made under Mary undoubtedly included her most conservative: Stephen Bayly, an ex-Benedictine of the monastery at St Albans, appointed to Knapton, Norfolk, in 1553 but who resigned the benefice in 1556 in order to return to religious life in the newly restored monastery of St Albans.⁸⁵ Conversely, they also included Edward Keble, former chaplain of the alleged evangelical Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, a married priest who was deprived of his previous benefice of Upminster in 1554 and who held onto Badlesmere successfully until his death in 1560.⁸⁶ John May or Man, instituted to Aston Sandford on the death of James Charnock in 1557, would later marry, become a court preacher under Elizabeth I, and made his will in 1597 before a trip to the wilds of Cumbria to capture a seminary priest.⁸⁷

However, as mentioned above, Mary's reign also saw the deprivation of three of Anne's priests, and this is worth investigating. The most common cause of deprivation between 1554-5 was marriage since at that point the heresy laws had not yet been revived, and one could not therefore be deprived for 'being a Protestant' this early in the reign.⁸⁸ This suggests that Lucas Taylor and William Bull, deprived in 1554, were or had been married, and are therefore unlikely to have been strict

advowson. The close association between the two places, and the fact that Anne held both manors, makes it likely that she also held the advowson to Stony Stratford alongside Calverton. See *VCH Buckingham*, 4, pp. 476-482.

⁸⁰ TNA PROB 11/31/403. Digitised by The Oxford Authorship Site at http://www.oxford-shakespeare.com/Probate/PROB_11-31_f_403.pdf [accessed 20.02.15].

⁸¹ 'Robartus, William' [Person ID 38160], CCED [accessed 13.03.15].

⁸² Calverton [Location ID 7102], CCED [accessed 13.03.15].

⁸³ Ashley Null, 'John Redman (1499-1551)', *ODNB* [accessed 20.2.15].

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ See Thomas F. Mayer and Courtney B. Walters, eds., *The Correspondence of Reginald Pole, Volume 4: A Biographical Companion: The British Isles* (Ashgate, 2008), p. 236, n. 112.

⁸⁶ *Correspondence of Reginald Pole*, IV, pp. 313-4; Badlesmere [Location ID 19], CCED [accessed 13.03.15].

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 360; Aston Sandford [Location ID 7076], CCED [accessed 13.03.15].

⁸⁸ Richard M. Spielmann, 'The beginning of clerical marriage in the English Reformation: the reigns of Edward and Mary', *Anglican and Episcopal History* 56:3 (1987), 251-263 (p. 259).

religious conservatives. Those clergymen whose wives were dead, or had been put away, were to be dealt with more leniently, and permitted to return to the priesthood, albeit in a different place; a concession to the severe deficit of suitably Roman Catholic candidates in the Marian church at this time.⁸⁹ We see this among Anne's priests. Edward Keble, instituted to Badlesmere, Kent, in 1557 and who we know had been married, had earlier been deprived of Upminster in 1554.⁹⁰ Geoffrey Astley, instituted to Castle Camps in 1557, had previously been deprived of his benefices at Snave and Shadoxhurst, Kent, in 1554.⁹¹ For those who would not put away their wives, no leniency was offered. Since there is no evidence of further employment for William Bull, it is possible that he fell into this category. Lucas Taylor, indeed, probably fell into Mary I's most hated clerical group: a former monk (from the Grey Friars at Cambridge) who had married.⁹² For men like him there could be no re-employment; they were forced to divorce from their wives and to undergo 'due punishment'.⁹³ This shows that Anne, as a patroness, did not object to clerical marriage.

The last of Anne's priests to be deprived was Richard Wadnowe of Castle Camps in 1557.⁹⁴ He had been the replacement at Castle Camps for Lucas Taylor, deprived in 1554. He was probably also the Richard/Nicholas Wadnowe employed as rector of Bradfield St George (also known as Bradfield Monachorum) and Bradfield St Clare in Suffolk in the 1550s, and as stipendiary curate of Bradfield in the mid-1570s.⁹⁵ The reason for his deprivation at Castle Camps is unclear. If he was married, surely this would have blocked his original appointment in 1554. By 1557 one could be deprived for 'heretical' Protestant views, but in Wadnowe's case this is necessarily speculative. The surviving records suggest that he remained in post at Bradfield St George until the next candidate was instituted in 1575, and we do not know what happened at Bradfield St Clare.

What does this mean? It is evident that Anne was not following one clear religious viewpoint when she chose priests to appoint to her benefices. Three of her appointees were ex-monks: Stephen Bayly, Lucas Taylor, and Richard Pranke, who became one of Anne's chaplains.⁹⁶ This does not mean she was religiously conservative; for a start, only Bayly appears to have retained definably 'Catholic' beliefs after the dissolution while Taylor and Pranke conformed to the new changes and Taylor, indeed, was deprived by Mary I in 1554. Moreover, even confirmed evangelicals like Katherine Willoughby-Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk, appointed ex-monks to their livings. Franklin-Harkrider notes that Willoughby's ex-religious came from houses under her own or her husband's patronage, and suggests that she was deliberately providing for those of her own clients displaced by the dissolution who shared her own religious views.⁹⁷ This was not the case for Anne, as neither St Albans, the Cambridge Grey Friars, nor West Acre Priory, the houses of Bayly, Taylor and Pranke respectively, were patronised by either the Howards or the de

⁸⁹ Spielmann, pp. 251-63.

⁹⁰ 'Keble, Edward' [Person ID 36629], CCED [accessed 31.03.5].

⁹¹ *Correspondence of Reginald Pole IV*, pp. 28-9.

⁹² John R. H. Moorman, *The Grey Friars in Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1952), p. 132.

⁹³ Spielmann, p. 256.

⁹⁴ 'Castle Camps' [Location ID 883], CCED [accessed 13.03.15].

⁹⁵ Bradfield [Location ID 19463], Bradfield St George [20818] and Bradfield St Clare [20817], CCED [accessed 31.03.15].

⁹⁶ *LP XV*, 1032, p. 547; Moorman, p. 132; 'A. Jessopp, ed., *Visitations of the Diocese of Norwich 1492-1532* (1888) p. 310; *LP XXI ii*, 146 (3).

⁹⁷ Franklin-Harkrider, p. 86.

Veres at the dissolution. It would also be difficult to claim that these particular candidates reflected her own views, since they appear to have held quite different religious positions. Since all these houses were local to her lands she may have been motivated by personal knowledge of these individuals, at least in Taylor and Pranke's cases since she appointed them fairly swiftly after the dissolution. Alternatively it may simply have been convenient to appoint those who were local.

In terms of overall analysis, then, a few things can be said with fair certainty. Anne was not an opponent of clerical marriage, since there is a very strong probability that the priests in two out of five of her benefices were deprived for this, and an equally strong probability that some of their replacements had also been married. What's more, she was also not opposed to ex-monks taking wives post-dissolution, and was indeed happy to employ ex-religious. These things suggest that she was not of a very strongly conservative bent. Beyond this, what can be said with reasonable certainty is that her appointments generally conformed to the religious standards of each given regime. I would argue that this was a choice in itself.

Another kind of clerical appointment which might in fact say more about the women's individual religious positions is their choice of personal chaplains, a theme which has received more scholarly consideration than appointments to advowsons.⁹⁸ Members of the aristocracy generally employed at least two household chaplains if not more. Chaplains resided within their patron's house and were chosen specifically for their abilities as preachers, confessors, and spiritual guides. Their role, however, could be far more varied; as work by David Crankshaw has shown, they might also work in a medical capacity, or function as legal witnesses to indentures, and were often used as trusted messengers.⁹⁹

Elizabeth Stafford-Howard, Duchess of Norfolk's, one known chaplain also appears to have held a degree since she referred to him in writing as 'Sir' William in 1539.¹⁰⁰ Dorothy Howard-Stanley, Countess of Derby's, chaplain in the mid-1530s, Thomas Bradshaw, held a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Canon Law degree.¹⁰¹ John Bale, chaplain to Mary, Duchess of Richmond in the 1540s and 50s, was a Doctor of Theology.¹⁰² This emphasis on learning suggests that for the Howard women, priests probably were the 'educational elite' of the household and as such were held in some importance, but on its own it does not give much insight into the religious tone of these establishments. It is interesting that for the majority of these chaplains there is little or no further information regarding religious position, and this may suggest that the women were concerned to appoint those who were not likely to prove controversial at any given point.¹⁰³ Indeed, the only known chaplain of these women who did not hold a degree was Richard Pranke, chaplain to Anne, Countess of Oxford, and we have already seen that his will of 1547 was non-committal. Pranke made Anne the sole beneficiary and executrix, and expressed the hope that she would be good to his brother and his brother's children, which suggests a close relationship between chaplain and patroness.¹⁰⁴ Since this would presumably not have been the

⁹⁸ See Adlington, Lockwood and Wright, eds., *Chaplains in early modern England*.

⁹⁹ Crankshaw, 'Chaplains to the Elizabethan nobility'.

¹⁰⁰ TNA SP1/144, fol. 16.

¹⁰¹ *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714*, ed. by Joseph Foster, at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk> [accessed 13.03.15].

¹⁰² *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, at <http://www.venn.lib.cam.ac.uk> [accessed 13.03.15].

¹⁰³ John Bale excepted.

¹⁰⁴ TNA PROB 11/31, fol. 403.

case had their religious views not also aligned, it seems likely that Anne too was content to remain religiously uncontroversial during this period.

There is also additional evidence for the beliefs of ‘Sir William’, chaplain to Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk, in the late 1530s. These gave her considerable cause for alarm in 1539 as a letter from her to Thomas Cromwell reveals.¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth’s letter relates a series of events that had led to the imprisonment of this chaplain in the bailey of her house. She had asked him whether he intended to fast during the coming Lent, to which he responded that he had fasted since childhood, but that he ‘wold nat ffast thys lent tyll he dyde se a new world’. Elizabeth rebuked him and asked him what he meant by this new world, and he replied ‘a nother way’. Taking alarm, she sent for the Archdeacon of St Albans and a local JP and had the priest put into the bailey for questioning. A search of his belongings turned up a ‘booke of juyggelyng’ which he had kept for the past three years. Coningsby, the JP, advised her to send the man to Cromwell, which, to judge by her letter, she did, but the case is untraceable beyond this point.

What was there in this to cause such alarm, and what light does it shed on Elizabeth’s religious sensibilities? His replies to her questions about fasting are not particularly revealing as they could be interpreted as the remarks of an entrenched conservative unhappy with the extent of religious change or equally as those of a grumbling evangelical who felt reform had not gone far enough. The ‘book of juyggelyng’ is another matter. Aside from its literal acrobatic meaning, ‘juggling’ was generally used to mean some kind of deceit or trickery. Following this meaning it is possible that the book could have had something to do with magic or prophecy since books of prophecies were popular at this time. However, prophecy was not yet a treasonable offence in 1539, and I have found no references to the word ‘juggling’ being used directly to mean ‘prophecy’ or indeed ‘magic’ during this specific period. The most common use of ‘juggling’ around this time was in reformist polemic referring to popery or practices of Roman Catholicism.¹⁰⁶ Even more specifically, it often referred to transubstantiation. It appears to have been a metaphor invoked only by evangelicals (or later, Protestants) against papists (or Roman Catholics). I have found no examples of reverse usage. This strongly suggests, then, that the book of juggling in William’s possession was probably a devotional text of some sort. That the phrase is Elizabeth’s own choice of words, and that she took alarm at its existence, describing it as ‘uncomely ffor ony part[y] to haue’ strongly suggests that in 1539 she was not a *Roman Catholic* and thus not on the far conservative side of the religious spectrum either.

Her letter also sheds some interesting light on contemporary conceptions of heresy and conformity, and their social, political and religious connotations. She is concerned to make it clear that the book is not her own, stating that her priest had kept it ‘by hys owne conffessyon as my servant p[ar]ker can shewe yowr lordeshipe howe I came by hyt’. After digressing she returned to the topic at the end of her letter, adding that ‘one specyall cause which I hadd forgotton whiche put me most in dredde that my pr[ies]t dyd say before my servant when I hadde takon the booke of juyggelyng frome

¹⁰⁵ TNA SP1/144, fol. 16. All further references to this source.

¹⁰⁶ Oxford English Dictionary at <http://www.oed.com> [accessed 15.03.15]; Nicoletta Caputo, ‘Entertainers ‘on the Vagabond Fringe’: Jugglers in Tudor and Stuart England’, in Paola Pugliatti and Alessandro Serpieri, eds., *English Renaissance Scenes: From Canon to Margins* (Bern, 2008), pp. 311-348, especially pp. 338-48; Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford, 2007), p. 186. The OED records the first usage in this sense in 1531 so it is entirely plausible that Elizabeth is using it in this way.

hym he said he wold nat for nothyng it shuld be knowen ffrom thens the boke dyd come', again suggesting that possession of it was a serious transgression. She was keen to assure Cromwell that she had told him 'eu[ery] thyng of thys matt'r'. Elizabeth's evident desire to disassociate herself from the episode is unlikely to have stemmed from a fear of reprisals against her own person. The nobility were rarely punished for any kind of religious transgression during this period, and Elizabeth would have known that. However, for one of her chaplains to be accused of popery in 1539 would raise suspicions about Elizabeth's own religious views, and those of her household, and therefore, about their loyalty to the regime. She was undoubtedly afraid that this would damage her standing with reformist figures like Cromwell.

III

Though neither Mary nor Anne left wills, several Howard women did. These can be used alongside other evidence to provide a snapshot of their networks and religious concerns towards the end of their lives. Wills are controversial sources. It has been said that they are not reliable indicators of religious preference, because the preamble, the part most likely to contain a statement of faith, tends towards the formulaic and may have been chosen by the scribe rather than the testator.¹⁰⁷ However, others have continued to assert the value of wills in this regard, with the caveat that one must look at the entire will, not just the preamble, and do so alongside other surviving evidence for the individual's beliefs where possible.¹⁰⁸ For literate aristocratic women like the Howards it seems unlikely that the preamble would have been chosen by the scribe without any input from the testatrix. As Attreed has posited, even if this were the case, the scribe himself would be chosen by the testator and sympathetic to their beliefs.¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, all three of these women were prominent aristocracy whose activities drew an audience. The infamous example of the 1531 will of Gloucestershire gentleman William Tracy, whose Lutheran preamble was posthumously declared heretical and his remains exhumed and burnt at the stake, showed that even local courts were vigilant about testamentary conformity.¹¹⁰ Nobody wanted their will thrown out of court, their wealth annexed by the state. For the aristocracy, who had issues of political loyalty and dynastic status to contend with as well as religion, the desire for survival – literal or political – probably also dictated a higher level of prudence in these matters than might be found in the wills of less important people. The question thus becomes not whether we can trust what they are saying, but whether we can clearly identify what that is, given the deliberate neutrality of many wills across this period. While it would be neglectful not to look at testamentary evidence, we cannot necessarily take it 'as read'.

Wills have survived for Agnes Tylney-Howard, dowager Duchess of Norfolk written in 1542; her daughter Katherine Howard-ap Rhys-Daubeney, Countess of Bridgwater, in 1554; and Elizabeth Stafford-Howard, Duchess of Norfolk, in 1558.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ See J. D. Alsop, 'Religious Preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40:1 (1989), 19-27, and Duffy, pp. 504-23.

¹⁰⁸ Lorraine C. Attreed, 'Preparation for Death in Sixteenth Century Northern England', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 13:3 (1982), 37-66; Caroline Litzenberger, 'Local Responses to Changes in Religious Policy Based on Evidence from Gloucestershire Wills, 1540-1580', *Continuity and Change* 8:3 (1993), 417-39.

¹⁰⁹ Attreed, p. 39.

¹¹⁰ Duffy, p. 511.

¹¹¹ TNA PROB 11/30/596 (Agnes); PROB 10/27 (Katherine); PROB 11/42A/285 (Elizabeth). Other widows who could have made wills but did not include Mary, dowager Duchess of Richmond, and Anne, dowager Countess of Oxford. This may mean that they died unexpectedly.

Each written under different regimes, the differences between them are not as overt as might be expected. Considering the preambles first, that of Agnes', written in 1542, is 'neutral'.¹¹² She commended her soul to 'almightie god my Creator and Redemer' without any mention of the Virgin Mary and/or the saints, and without referring on the other hand to assurance of salvation. Officially this is unproblematic. We should note, however, that Agnes is a little ahead of her time here as in 1542 there had not yet been any legislation outlawing traditional forms in wills, and local studies show that the majority of testators still continued to use them.¹¹³ Her daughter Katherine in 1554 also placed her soul neutrally 'in to thandes of Almightye God my Savyour & Redemo^f & c'. The inclusion of '& c' at the end may give us pause for thought; Litzenberger concedes that it might sometimes be used as a 'cover up' of traditional beliefs to stand for 'and the Virgin Mary and all the company of Heaven' or some such traditional variant. However, it could also be a literal attempt to save time and ink.¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Stafford-Howard, dowager Duchess of Norfolk, did include a much more 'traditional' preamble in 1558, bequeathing her soul 'to almightie god to oure lady seynt marye and to all the blessed companye of heaven'. The specific date of Elizabeth's will makes this very interesting as it was written on 30 November 1558, barely a fortnight after Elizabeth I's accession. This could mean that Elizabeth was simply conforming to what was still, legally and in most peoples' eyes, 'the norm' of Mary's Catholic revival. On the other hand, neutral preambles were still very much in vogue and acceptable to all, so there was no need for Elizabeth to include such an overtly Catholic preamble at this time except by specific choice.

It is easy to see that the preambles alone are not enough to tell the whole story here. The body of the will, the identity of the witnesses, and, where known, the circumstances under which the will was made are equally as important. Agnes, dowager Duchess of Norfolk's will of 1542 with the neutral preamble was written while she was still imprisoned in the Tower of London on a charge of misprision of treason for her part in the fiasco of Queen Catherine Howard's adulteries. To write her will at this time, after 'rype and good deliberacion', suggests she did not expect to survive this experience. In fact she was released a few months later and lived until 1545, but did not alter this will in the meantime.¹¹⁵ Did the hope of reprieve, and the fact that at least one of her two witnesses was an ecclesiastical commissioner for the Crown, lead her to dampen expressions of religious belief?¹¹⁶ It is often assumed in the absence of concrete evidence that women of Agnes' generation – she was born c. 1477, and thus lived most of her life under the 'old' church – were strongly conservative, attached irrevocably to the church of their upbringing.¹¹⁷ In fact Agnes' will is tempered. She did leave bequests to religious personnel and institutions – two silver spoons to John Rabon, 'channtery priste of Lambithe', and her best chalice to 'my chapple at Lambith'.¹¹⁸ The Howard chapel was not an officially endowed chantry and Rabon was not employed by the Howards, since he received his salary

¹¹² For categorisation of will preambles, see Attreed, p. 40, and Litzenberger, pp. 422-5.

¹¹³ This was not the case until 1544 with Cranmer's litany.

¹¹⁴ Litzenberger, p. 425.

¹¹⁵ *LP XVII*, 362 (25).

¹¹⁶ The witnesses were John Lynsey and Henry Whitereason Esq., the latter being originally from Hackney (BL Add. Ch. 45875) but later one of the chantry commissioners for Northumberland (Richard Welford, *History of Newcastle and Gateshead*, vol 2 (1885), p. 25.)

¹¹⁷ Smith, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ The Howard chapel in St Mary's Lambeth across the street from Norfolk House.

from the Southwark deanery.¹¹⁹ The bequests themselves were not religious items, and she did not specifically ask for prayers for her own or anybody else's soul, which is a cautious move given that they were not yet legally outlawed. Nevertheless, Attreed has argued that at this time bequests like this 'did not exclude a religious motivation' and that there remained an unwritten expectation of prayers in exchange for such gifts.¹²⁰ Taken as a whole, the will is undoubtedly religiously cautious, with indications of attachment to traditional religion but nothing definite to go on. The circumstances under which it was written seem especially important here. In fear for her life and under the eye of the Crown, Agnes may well have felt that discretion was the better part of valour.

Her daughter Katherine, Countess of Bridgewater's will of March 1554 is remarkably similar. By this date Mary I was on the throne. The Edwardian reforms had been repealed, Mass had been restored, and Injunctions for the deprivation of married clergy had just been passed. Officially, therefore, the church was at the point it had been in 1546, but was in transit and it is easy to see why people might have been cautious about expressions of belief. Katherine was living on the estate of the Archbishop of Canterbury in Lambeth and described herself as 'sycke of bodye'. Like her mother, her preamble was neutral. She too left bequests to religious personnel: 20s to Thomas Bentley, the curate of St Mary's Lambeth where all three women were buried, and 10s to the parson John Whitwell, who was also Thomas Cranmer's chaplain and whom we know was an evangelical, though held onto his benefice until 1560.¹²¹ Like her mother, Katherine included no open exhortations for prayers, but again it is possible that these were supposed to be inferred. Where once such bequests would have been placed at the beginning of the will immediately after the preamble, signifying their importance, Katherine placed them towards the end of the will, after bequests to kin, friends and servants, with which the majority of the will is concerned. Only one recipient is of obvious religious note aside from the clergymen. Emery Tilney, described as 'kinesmane' – a relation of her mother Agnes, née Tilney – had been the pupil of reformer George Wishart at Cambridge in the 1540s, and gave a memorial of Wishart to John Foxe for his martyrology.¹²² He was also probably the author of a metrical poem, *Song of the Lord's Supper*, in 1550, which upheld Edwardian policy in its description of the Eucharist as a symbolic representation of Christ's sacrifice.¹²³ Whether Katherine included him in her will because of his beliefs, because he was her kin, or because he turned up on her doorstep at the time of writing (invited or uninvited, he signed as a witness to the will) we do not know. That she did include him might at least suggest that kinship 'trumped' religious beliefs.

Alongside Tilney, the witnesses included Whitwell and Bentley, parson and curate respectively of St Mary's Lambeth; Arthur Assheby, one of Katherine's servants of a line who had served the Howards for more than one generation; and four more men, two unidentifiable (John Bever and Thomas Bystare) and two illegible. Those we can identify makes this appear a remarkably reformist line-up. At the end of her will, however, Katherine took the trouble to write that she had set her seal and

¹¹⁹ *LP IV*, 5125. Rabon's traditional will dated 1559 makes no mention of any relationship with the Howards (TNA PROB 11/42A/483).

¹²⁰ Attreed, p. 48.

¹²¹ MacCulloch, p. 15.

¹²² He later wrote a memorial of Wishart for Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. See *TAMO* (1583 edition), Book 8, p. 1291 [accessed 31/03/15].

¹²³ Emery Tilney, *Here beginneth a song of the Lordes Supper* (imprinted at London by William Copland, 1550), Early English Books Online at <http://www.eebo.chadwyck.com> [accessed 31.03.15].

signed her will ‘the daie & yere of lorde abouesayed and in the ffirst yere of the reigne of most drede sou[er]jayne Ladie Quene marye by the grace of God Quene of Englonde ffrance & Ireland defender of the ffayeth & of the churche of Englonde & Ireland’. This seems unnecessarily lengthy, and signs of support for the Marian regime could more easily have been inferred through a Catholic preamble and religious bequests. In the context of the rest of the will, this reads as a deliberate statement of conformity with the Marian regime from an individual who was nevertheless not prepared to go ‘the whole hog’ and re-embrace traditional Catholicism.

The will of Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk in November 1558, had a traditional preamble, but this is less clearly reflected elsewhere in the will. Like Agnes and Katherine, Elizabeth’s bequests show a preoccupation with helping family and friends first and foremost. Like them, she did not ask for any prayers, but unlike them she left no bequests to religious personnel or institutions. She did leave her ‘greater tablettes’ to her grandson Thomas, 4th Duke of Norfolk. These were probably religious images or icons, in which case it may have been significant that she chose to leave them to the family’s undeniably Protestant heir. She alone of the three left money for her funeral, £25 to be bestowed ‘by the discretion of myn execut[or]’, and in like vein she charged her executor (her brother Henry, Lord Stafford) to perform her will ‘for the healthe of my sowle’. Both of these are deliberately neutral and have been described by Duffy as examples of testators’ caution.¹²⁴ Of her three witnesses, two, John Knight the clerk and Robert Sutton the notary public, are unremarkable.¹²⁵ The third signed himself ‘Anthony ffortescue’. If this was the Roman Catholic Sir Anthony Fortescue who had been released from custody only five days earlier, having attempted to cast the horoscope of the new Queen Elizabeth, his presence is revealing. It suggests that her house was his first port of call, a safe place after his release. Since he came from Punsbourne in Hertfordshire, only fifteen or so miles away from Elizabeth’s home at Redbourn, it is not implausible that the two knew each other. If this Anthony was her witness it would indeed suggest that she identified as a Catholic by this point in her life. Taken as a whole, Elizabeth’s will is cautiously Catholic, and seems to indicate some desire to remain under the religious radar.

IV

This study has shown that the women of the Howard dynasty were involved in religious and political culture at an extremely elite level. They employed chaplains and priests already renowned, and several who would go on to carve out prestigious careers. They were in regular contact with both secular and spiritual architects of the Reformation, such as Thomases Cromwell and Cranmer. They actively patronised religious writers and Mary, Duchess of Richmond’s patronage in particular reads like a roll-call of influential evangelical polemicists: John Bale, Thomas Becon, John Foxe. Mary was, perhaps, on another level in this regard, but these women as a group are not especially unusual. Other noblewomen also had contact with a variety of elite figures and were making many of the same choices about spiritual employees and patronage, and they deserve greater attention as a social entity. The Howard women did not, however, share the same religious beliefs, but occupied different positions on the early Reformation religious spectrum, and in some cases these changed with time.

¹²⁴ Duffy, p. 513.

¹²⁵ This may be the John Knight who was recorder of Hythe, Kent, during this time. See <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/knight-john-ii-1520-66> [accessed 31.03.15].

The majority engaged in some activity at some stage which might be termed 'conservative'; Katherine, Countess of Bridgwater's intercession with Cromwell for Richard Whiting, the Abbot of Glastonbury, for example, or Anne, dowager Countess of Oxford's role in condemning John Lambert for his preaching against praying to saints. But equally most also display evidence of behaviour which might be thought contradictory to the above; the employment of married priests by Anne and Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk; the evangelical line-up of witnesses to Katherine's will. Aside from Mary, who develops unequivocally evangelical beliefs, it is impossible to 'pin down' the rest of these women to a defined religious position. This is important as it shows there was no collective dynastic religious identity among the Howards during this period, and argues strongly for the inclusion of women in our assessment of elites for this purpose.

The fact that we cannot identify these women's specific beliefs tells us a lot in itself about their response to religious change across this period. What the evidence appears to show above all else is an active desire to stay out of trouble, a desire, then, to conform. Take, for instance, Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk's, clear concern to remove herself from the situation of her priest with his controversial 'book of juggelyng', the way that Mary, Duchess of Richmond kept a lid on her religious activity until Edward's reign, and the demonstrable caution of bequests and sentiments in their wills. But to what were they conforming? Conformity is a problematic concept and has had a complicated historiography. It used to be seen by historians (and some contemporaries) as an easy, lazy option for those who went along unthinkingly with religious change or who perhaps did not care much either way. Alexandra Walsham did much to challenge this perception with her study of 'church papists' – it is now generally accepted that conformity was as much a choice as any other religious position – but as with so much of the work on this topic it is focused on the Elizabethan era.¹²⁶ Generally speaking, conformity during Henry's reign is used to mean agreement with, or lack of opposition to, the Act of Supremacy (1534), but appears to mean more than this during Edward and Mary's reigns, where acceptance and repudiation respectively of royal supremacy became insufficient as their policies became more 'extreme'.¹²⁷ Partly this was because religious positions themselves evolved over these years, making the 'dos and do-nots' less ambiguous for both sides and by extension defining conformity more clearly. Nevertheless its definition remains problematic as it depends on the viewpoint taken. When the King, the Church, the state, the law and the people were not speaking with one voice about religious policy, whose conformity should historians use? The evidence for the Howard women makes it clear that for them, at least, it was the state – in the form of the King, his officials, and the law – who decided what was conformist and what not, what was acceptable behaviour and what would lead you into trouble, since it is in their correspondence with state officials that we see the clearest desire to conform. Their attitudes also strongly suggest that conformity during the latter half of Henry's reign was about more than acceptance of the royal supremacy as their concerns and caution appear to have more to do with the letter of the law in addition to this. Clearly there is room for more detailed work on this concept during the early Reformation.

The Howard women's responses to religious change are also interesting in light of their status and gender. They belong to a social group we do not usually hear much about. Scholarly accounts of women during the Reformation tend to concern

¹²⁶ Walsham, *Church Papists*; see also Lake and Questier, *Conformity and Orthodoxy*.

¹²⁷ Shagan, *Popular Politics*, and O'Grady, *Henry VIII and the Conforming Catholics*.

Protestant women as patronesses of reform, or Catholic recusants keeping the fires of the old faith burning as integral cogs in an underground network. When we hear about elites, it is again either as agents of the Reformation in its generally accepted top-down implementation, or as active opponents. The Howard women do not fit neatly into any of these categories. The surviving evidence suggests their religious activities were reactive and based on considerations other than faith alone. This does not mean that they were not religious leaders. All nobles were to some degree; their elite status meant that they were making choices about which priests or chaplains to employ, what kind of services and chapel goods to use, and how to define themselves in their wills. Through these means they were necessarily influencing their own households and the wider communities in which they resided. For Mary, Duchess of Richmond, this also crucially meant influencing the next generation of Howards through her employment of John Foxe as their tutor, a level of influence that does not receive the attention it deserves. This means we can indeed talk about a peculiarly aristocratic response to the Reformation, because of the added social and political implications of their spiritual decisions and the influence those additional factors had on their religious choices.

But can we talk about a *gendered* aristocratic response to the Reformation? This is more difficult for the Howard women because they were widows. On the other hand, that independent legal status is the reason much of the evidence here exists in the first instance, and so a truly representative study would be difficult. I do not think that elite widows came under more scrutiny or pressure to conform than male aristocrats did during this period. Mary, Duchess of Richmond, provides the most interesting example because though widowed, she was the least independent during these years, her age meaning she continued to live under her father's roof and rule until his arrest in 1546. Her behaviour clearly shows how choices about religion were entwined with family, dynastic and political concerns. Mary's evangelical activity did not blossom until a) it was legally allowed and b) she was able to run her own household, and at no point does she seem to have fought her conservative (though conformist) father on religious grounds. But the others, too, were governed by material needs. During Henry VIII's reign Elizabeth, Duchess of Norfolk, needed Cromwell's help to negotiate the financial settlement she so desperately wanted from her husband, and both Agnes, dowager Duchess of Norfolk, and Katherine, Countess of Bridgewater, were dependent on the Crown's mercy for freedom from imprisonment. During Edward's reign Mary, Elizabeth and Katherine were all financially dependent on the Crown to continue to grant them living expenses in the form of annuities or access to formerly confiscated jointure lands. In these circumstances common sense would dictate a level of religious, as well as political, prudence. In this sense it would seem that because noblewomen, even widows, were generally more dependent upon the goodwill of their families and the state than their male relatives, so they may have been more pragmatic in their response to religious change. On the other hand, this level of dependence upon the Crown may have been a peculiarly Howard characteristic, since the reasons for it were generally to do with previous involvement in dubious, even treasonous activity. It is striking that of the high number of members of the Howard dynasty executed during these years, not one was for anything approaching heresy. This highlights a need for more gender-nuanced work on aristocratic responses to religious change.