

Agnes Howard, Duchess of Norfolk

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Agnes Howard (née **Tilney**) (c. 1477 – May 1545) was the second wife of Thomas Howard, 2nd Duke of Norfolk. Two of King Henry VIII's Queens were her step-granddaughters, Anne Boleyn, and Catherine Howard. After her mother's death, Catherine Howard was in the Dowager Duchess's care during her youth, and as a result of the Duchess's lax guardianship, committed sexual indiscretions while in the Duchess's household which led to her execution as Queen. Agnes' brother, Sir Philip Tilney of Shelley (d.1533), was the paternal grandfather of Edmund Tilney (1535/6–1610), Master of the Revels to Queen Elizabeth and King James. Edmund Tilney's mother, Malyn, was implicated in the scandal surrounding Queen Catherine's downfall.

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Marriage

Agnes Tilney, born around 1477, was the daughter of Hugh Tilney of Skirbeck and Boston, Lincolnshire by Eleanor, daughter of Walter Tailboys and Alice Stafford Cheyney.^{[1][2]} Her brother, Sir Philip Tilney of Shelley (d.1533), was in the service of Thomas Howard, then Earl of Surrey, the husband of Agnes' cousin, Elizabeth Tilney. Surrey's first wife died on 4 April 1497, and he and Agnes were married four months later by dispensation dated 17 August 1497.^[1] Agnes brought Surrey little by way of dowry.^[3]

The marriage coincided with a change in Surrey's fortunes. As a supporter of Richard III, for whom he fought at Bosworth in 1485, Surrey was not in high favour during the early years of the reign of Henry VII. However, in 1499 he was recalled to court, and in the following year he accompanied the King on a state visit to France. In 1501 he was sworn of the Privy Council, and on 16 June of that year was named Lord Treasurer. In the same year he was involved in successful diplomatic negotiations with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella for a marriage between the Spanish Infanta, Catherine of Aragon, and Henry VII's eldest son Arthur, Prince of Wales. When Prince Arthur died on 2 April 1502, Surrey supervised the funeral. In 1503 he escorted the King's daughter, Margaret Tudor, to Scotland for her wedding to King James IV.^[4]

Agnes Tilney

Duchess of Norfolk



Spouse(s) Thomas Howard, 2nd Duke of Norfolk

Issue

William Howard, 1st Baron Howard of Effingham
Lord Thomas Howard
Richard Howard
Dorothy Howard
Anne Howard
Katherine Howard
Elizabeth Howard

Noble family House of Howard

Father Hugh Tilney

Mother Eleanor, daughter of Walter Tailboys

Born c.1477

Died May 1545

On 21 April 1509 Henry VII died. Surrey was an executor of the late King's will, and served as Earl Marshal at the coronation of Henry VIII. When a Scottish army invaded after Henry VIII had departed for Calais on 30 June 1513, Surrey crushed the Scottish forces at Flodden on 9 September. The victory brought Surrey popular renown and royal rewards. On 1 February 1514 he was created Duke of Norfolk, and his son Thomas was made Earl of Surrey. Both were granted lands and annuities, and the Howard arms were augmented in honour of Flodden.^[4]

Norfolk's leading position among the nobility was reflected in the Duchess's role at court. She was godmother to Princess Mary, and attended the Princess during a visit to France in 1520.^[3]

By the spring of 1522 Norfolk was almost 80 years of age and in failing health. He retired to his ducal castle at Framlingham in Suffolk where he died on 21 May 1524. His funeral and burial on 22 June at Thetford Priory were said to have been 'spectacular and enormously expensive', befitting the richest and most powerful peer in England.^[5]

Dowager Duchess

The Dowager Duchess remained in favour after her husband's death. Ordinances issued at Eltham in 1526 indicate that she was accorded first place in the Queen's household after the King's sister Mary Tudor.^[3]

On 23 May 1533 Archbishop Thomas Cranmer declared Henry VIII's marriage to his first Queen, Katherine of Aragon, a nullity.^[6] On or about 25 January 1533 the King had already married the Dowager Duchess's step-granddaughter Anne Boleyn in a secret ceremony.^[7] Anne was crowned Queen on 1 June 1533.^[7] The Dowager Duchess bore Anne's train in the coronation procession, and was godmother at the christening of Anne's daughter, Princess Elizabeth.^[3] Anne's two subsequent miscarriages caused the King misgivings about the marriage, but Anne's downfall ultimately came about as a result of her conflict with the King's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, over the distribution of the spoils from the dissolution of the monasteries. Anne was charged with adultery and high treason, and on 19 May 1536 was beheaded at Tower Green.^[7]

The King then took Jane Seymour as his third wife. Two years after her death, at Cromwell's instigation the King wed Anne of Cleves on 6 January 1540. However the King's physical revulsion for his new bride^[8] led to a speedy annulment of the marriage by Act of Parliament on 12 July 1540.^[9] By then Catherine Howard,^[10] another of the Dowager Duchess's step-granddaughters, had already caught the King's eye. Henry and Catherine were married at a private ceremony at Oatlands on 28 July 1540.^[11] Despite the fact that Henry was much in love with her,^[12] referring to her as his "rose without a thorn",^[12] the marriage quickly came to a disastrous end. While the King and Queen were on progress during the fall of 1541, the religious reformer John Lassells and his sister Mary Hall told Archbishop Cranmer of the Queen's sexual indiscretions with her music master, Henry Manox, and a Howard kinsman, Francis Dereham, while she had been a young girl living in the Dowager Duchess's household at Lambeth.^[13]

On 1 November 1541 Cranmer revealed these matters in a letter to the King. The King immediately ordered that the Queen be confined to her apartments, and never saw her again.^[14] The Dowager Duchess, hearing reports of what had happened while Catherine had been under her lax guardianship, reasoned that 'If there be none offence sithence the marriage, she cannot die for that was done before'.^[15] Unfortunately for the Queen and the Dowager Duchess, further investigations by Cranmer and the Council revealed that with the connivance of one of her attendants, Lady Rochford, Catherine had allegedly had an affair with Thomas Culpeper, one of the King's favourite gentlemen of the privy chamber, after her marriage to the King.^[16]

Dereham, Manox, and other members of the Dowager Duchess's household were arrested and interrogated by the Council.^[17] Her stepson, the Duke of Norfolk, was sent to search her house at Lambeth and question members of the household. They revealed that the Duchess had attempted to destroy evidence by burning the

papers of Dereham and his friend William Damport. The Duchess was sent to the Tower. Towards the end of November she was questioned by the Council, but could add little to what was already known by her interrogators.^[18] On 1 December Dereham and Culpeper were arraigned on charges of treason. Both were convicted at trial, and sentenced to death. Dereham and his friend William Damport were tortured in an attempt to wring confessions from them concerning Queen Catherine's alleged adultery, and on 10 December 1541 Dereham and Culpeper were executed at Tyburn. On the same day the Dowager Duchess was again questioned, and admitted to having promoted her niece as a prospective bride for the King while having knowledge of her prior misconduct, to having persuaded the Queen to take Dereham into her service, and to having burned Dereham's letters.

By mid-December the Dowager Duchess's eldest son, William Howard, his wife, and the Duchess's daughter Anne Howard were committed to the Tower. About the same time another of the Duchess's daughters, Katherine Daubeney, Lady Bridgewater was also arrested. On 14 December 1541, Norfolk, fearful for his own safety, denounced his stepmother and kin in a letter to the King. On 22 December William Howard and his wife, and a number of servants who had been witnesses to the Queen's misconduct, including Malyn Tilney^[19] (mother of Edmund Tilney, future Master of the Revels to Queen Elizabeth), were arraigned for misprision of treason 'for concealing the evil demeanour of the Queen, to the slander of the King and his succession'. All were sentenced to life imprisonment and loss of goods, although most were pardoned after Queen Catherine's execution. The Dowager Duchess, although included in the indictment, was not brought to trial as she was 'old and testy', and 'may die out of perversity to defraud the King's Highness of the confiscation of her goods', but like the others she was sentenced to imprisonment and forfeiture of lands and goods.

On 6 February 1542 a bill of attainder against Queen Catherine and Lady Rochford received final reading, and on 13 February 1542 the Queen and Lady Rochford were beheaded on Tower Green. The King was of the view that there was as much reason to convict the Dowager Duchess of treason as there had been to convict Dereham. However the Council urged leniency, and she was eventually released from the Tower on 5 May 1542. Her stepson, the Duke of Norfolk, escaped punishment, but was never fully trusted again by the King.^[20]

Death

The Dowager Duchess died in May 1545, and was buried at Thetford Priory on the 31st of that month. On 31 October, as directed in her will, she was re-interred at Lambeth Church in Surrey.^[3]

Issue

- William Howard, 1st Baron Howard of Effingham
- Lord Thomas Howard (1511–1537)^[21]
- Richard Howard (d.1517)^[22]
- Dorothy Howard, married Edward Stanley, 3rd Earl of Derby^[23]
- Anne Howard, married John de Vere, 14th Earl of Oxford^[22]
- Katherine Howard (d.1554), married firstly Rhys ap Gruffydd, and secondly Henry Daubeney, 1st Earl of Bridgewater (d.1548).^[24]
- Elizabeth Howard (d. 1536), married Henry Radclyffe, 2nd Earl of Sussex.^[22]

Footnotes

1. Richardson 2004 p. 237
2. "Cracroft's Peerage."(<http://www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online/content/Kyme1295.htm>)
3. Davies 2008
4. Head 2008.
5. Head 2008; Cokayne 1936
6. Davies January 2008

7. Ives 2004.
8. Weir 1991, pp. 396–398
9. Weir 1991, p. 424
10. Weir 1991, pp. 413–414
11. Weir 1991, pp. 419, 428
12. Weir 1991, pp. 435–436
13. Weir 1991, p. 468
14. Weir 1991, pp. 444–448
15. Weir 1991, p. 449
16. Weir 1991, pp. 450–455, 460–465
17. Weir 1991, pp. 452, 459–465
18. Weir 1991, pp. 467–468
19. Dutton 2008; Boas 1970, pp. 40–41
20. Weir 1991, pp. 469–482
21. Riordan 2004
22. Weir 1991.
23. Weir 1991; Knafla 2008
24. Weir 1991; Cokayne 1916, p. 105

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