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Note on Conventions

Spelling

There was no standardization of spelling, including for proper names, in the sixteenth century. Quotations from sixteenth-century texts have been modernized, but an effort has been made to preserve punctuation and archaic vocabulary, with definitions provided in the footnotes and glossary. Where necessary, I have attempted to use spellings to make distinctions between individuals (for instance, the elder Katherine and younger Catherine Dudley, elder Henry and younger Harry Dudley, as well as Catherine of Aragon, Katherine Howard and Catherine Parr). I have largely modernized place names, except in a few cases so as to preserve the original sense of the name. Non-English place names have been Anglicized.

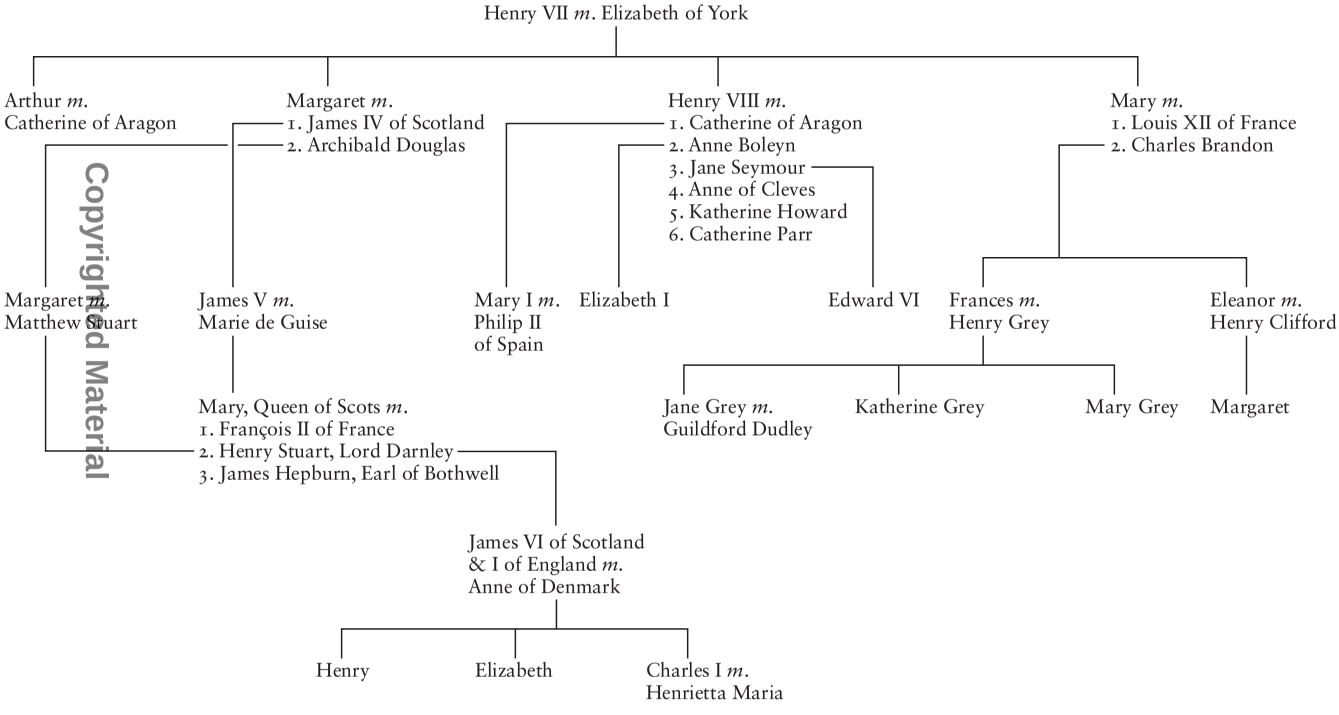
Dates

Much of Europe adopted the Gregorian calendar in October 1582, but England persisted with the Julian calendar until 1751, meaning there was a difference of ten days between countries of continental Europe and England from the latter part of the sixteenth century. Dates here have been given in Old Style (according to the Julian calendar), but with the presumption that the new year begins on 1 January, not 25 March.

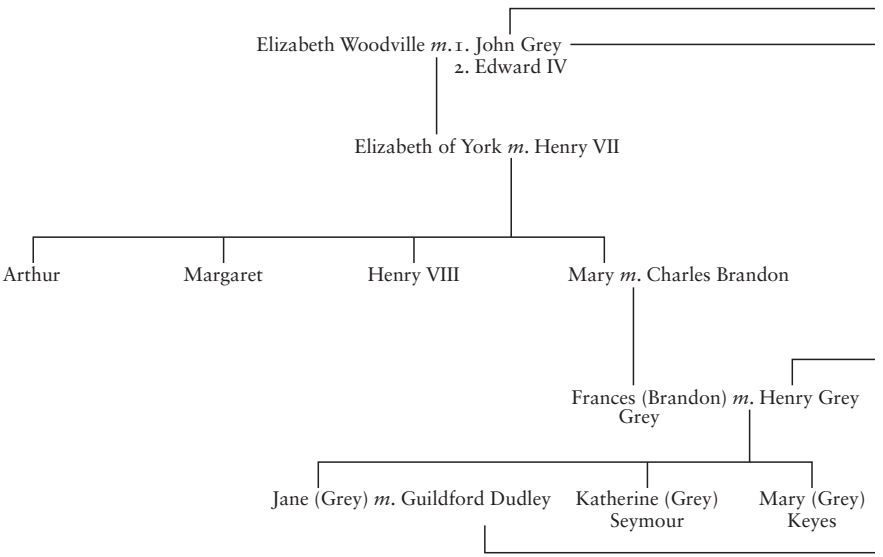
Money

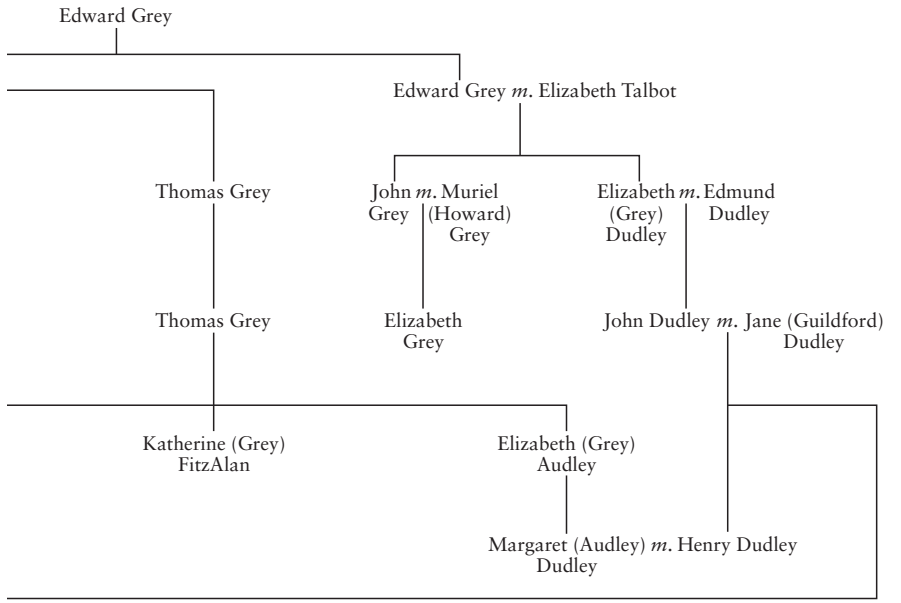
All values have been given in contemporary terms. One pound in 1500 was worth about £665.96 in 2017, one pound in 1550 about £274.70 in 2017, and one pound in 1600 about £137.88 in 2017. These values and the purchasing power of the amount have been taken from https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/. More detailed and slightly different conversions can also be found at https://measuringworth.com/.

Houses of Tudor & Stuart

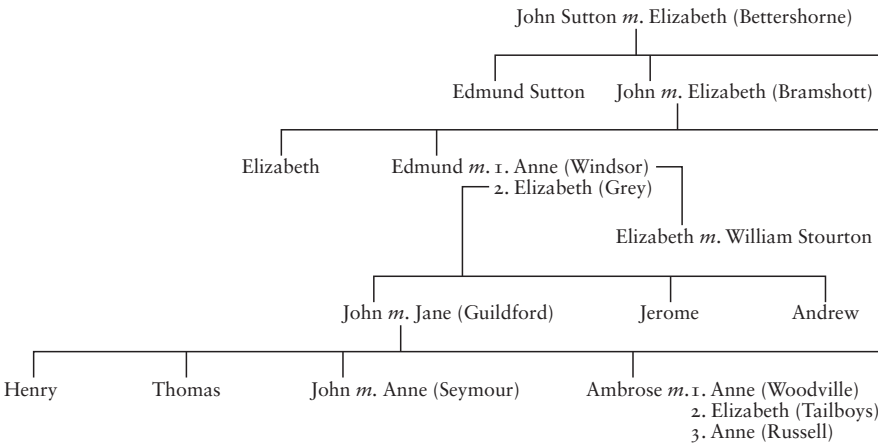


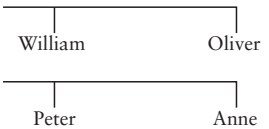
House of Grey

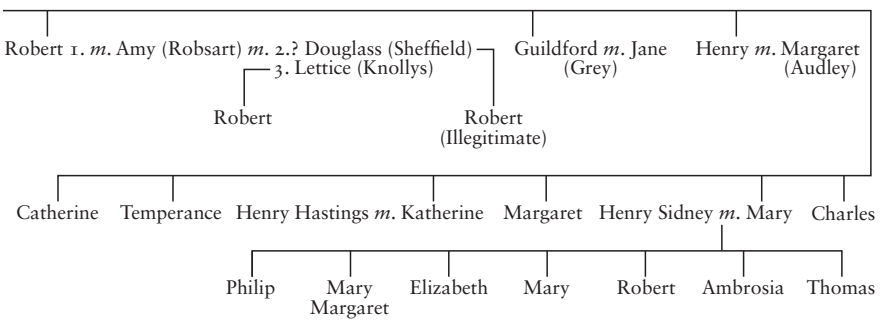




House of Dudley







England *c.* 1500

Prologue
A tribe of traitors

> *'For it is a settled rule of Machiavel which the Dudleys do observe, that where you have once done a great injury, there must you never forgive.'*

The forbidden book circulated the Elizabethan court in the summer of 1584.

Clutched at by greedy fingers, laughed over by jealous tongues, it had a modest title: *The Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Arts at Cambridge*. What it contained, however, was enough to have the author – whoever they were – punished with public mutilation. As the clandestine work spread like a wildfire across the court and beyond, while the queen's spymaster intimidated and interrogated to uncover the author, the work acquired a new title: *Leicester's Commonwealth*.

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was one of the most powerful men in the English court. One did not reach such heights without making enemies and, perhaps, deserving them. The little book rehearsed a litany of crimes committed by the earl – 'plots, treasons, murders, falsehoods, poisonings, lusts, incitements and evil stratagems' – all of which endangered crown and country.[1] Robert Dudley had killed husbands to acquire their wives, killed his own wife to marry the queen and discarded women who bore him children. He was forever ruled by his lust and ambition, neither of which could be fully sated.

But it was not just Robert who suffered in this short book. For generations, its author proclaimed, the House of Dudley had raised its

children to challenge England's monarchs for the throne. Robert had been 'nuzzled in treason from his infancy'.[2] 'From his ancestors,' the pamphlet asserted, 'this lord receiveth neither honour nor honesty, but only succession of treason and infamy.'[3]

For decades the Dudley family and its emblem, the bear chained to the ragged staff, had become linked with ruthless and bloody ambition. Violent riot, rebellion and warfare could all be traced back to this single family, who had risen from political irrelevance within living memory. From this unimportant beginning, three generations of Dudleys had stood at the right hand of monarchs. Three generations of Dudleys had been revealed as traitorous vipers, stained by treason, and faced the executioner's blade. Vanity and vainglory, desire and deadly purpose – these defined the name of Dudley as the little pamphlet circulated the court.

Readers from either side of the religious and political divides that rent Queen Elizabeth's England began to wonder: was it true? Were the children of the House of Dudley raised to conspire against the ruling house of England? Was the Dudley family scheming to the highest ambition in the land?

Were the Dudleys out to steal the throne?

PART ONE
1500–1510

1
Remember that you must die

The priest stood outside his humble church just before dawn, in the shadow of the forests and meadows of the rolling South Downs in Tortington, Sussex.[1] Wearing his alb and stole, he thrust a spade into the damp earth, carving a large cross into the soil: 'This is the gate of the Lord,' he intoned, 'the just shall enter into it.'[2]

He was marking a grave for the body of a young mother. The corpse of Anne Dudley, born Anne Windsor, had been prepared and watched since her passing, to be sure that life would not return to it.[3] Her soul was already suffering in Purgatory; the priest's arrangements would begin the long process of lifting it to Heaven and scaring off the demons who might seek to seize her.[4]

The priest's parish of Tortington was a place of little national importance. Just north of the church was Tortington Priory, a small monastic community. The Priory had been founded at the end of the twelfth century by a former mistress of King Henry I, Alice de Corbet, who dedicated both church and priory to Mary Magdalene; perhaps de Corbet saw something of herself in the repentant harlot who dedicated her life to God.[5]

The church itself had been cobbled together with flint and chalk rubble scavenged from various other buildings.[6] Some of the stones had a bright green moss growing on them; others had had some part of them chipped off, exposing their bright white interior, like a flash of light across the murky surface of a pond. The effect was of a mosaic that never quite resolved itself into a clear picture.

Not long after the priest's preparations were complete, the ringing of a small bell heralded the arrival of the wrapped body to the church.

Dressed in solemn black, her lead mourners were women – family and friends – who were expected to precede the arrival of the rest of her family, such as her brother and sisters, and her husband, Edmund Dudley. The procession was of a decent size; Edmund and Anne were notables in the area and able to afford a modestly elaborate ceremony. They had been well matched; both were children of the violent civil war which had devastated the country in the last century and both were members of families who had risen up in the vacuum of power left by slaughtered noble houses.

Edmund's grandfather had been Sir John Sutton Dudley, a noted courtier and diplomat. Before Edmund was born, Sir John had fought beside the legendary King Henry V on the battlefields of France and travelled as far as Prussia and Mantua on behalf of the Crown. With the accession of Henry VI and the outbreak of war, Sutton Dudley clung to favour, and was wounded and captured fighting against the opposing forces of Richard, Duke of York. He switched sides, however, when the king himself was captured in 1460, and joined the court of the new Yorkist king Edward IV, becoming Constable of the Tower of London. There he oversaw the imprisonment of the warrior queen whom he had formerly served, Margaret of Anjou.

Edmund had been in his youth when he watched his grandfather dextrously and repeatedly switch loyalties, welcoming the reigns of Edward V, Richard III and Henry VII in quick succession in the years 1483 to 1485. John Sutton Dudley died two years into the reign of Henry VII, and the title of Lord Dudley followed the line of his eldest son. Edmund was the child of Sir John's second son, also called John. This younger John had not had such an illustrious career, but through his marriage to Elizabeth Bramshott he had secured a reliable amount of wealth and security with which to raise his family.

Edmund Dudley had, thus, received a gentleman's education. Thanks to his time at Oxford, Edmund was trained in the classics – authors such as Aristotle, Cicero and Augustine – as well as in the power of rhetoric and persuasion. He had left before finishing his degree, a fairly traditional move, in order to train in the law at the Inns of Court. There he joined other young men as they pored over legal texts by day and caroused about London by night.

It was not long after passing the bar in London that Edmund had married the young Anne Windsor. Anne's father had been appointed Constable of Windsor Castle by Richard III and died shortly after the accession of Henry VII. Her mother, Lady Elizabeth Windsor, remarried, and took as her new husband Sir Robert Lytton, the Keeper of the Wardrobe to Henry VII. Lytton's position put him in powerful proximity to the king, as overseer of all transactions of the royal household. Anne was the youngest of the Windsor daughters and the last to be married; her father had left her 100 marks, or just over £66, a skilled tradesman's salary for several years, in his will for her dowry.[7] It was not just the modest dowry, however, that Anne Windsor brought to her marriage with Edmund Dudley, but a growing proximity to power, an even more valuable asset.

Such a marriage was not just the joining of two people, but of two families. In the time since their wedding, Edmund Dudley and Anne's eldest brother, Andrew Windsor, had become staunch allies, working together securing lands in Sussex for both the Dudleys and the Windsors.[8] Andrew, his younger brothers, Anthony and John, and their two sisters had married into some of the most influential families in Sussex. Edmund also had siblings, two younger brothers and two sisters. Together, they had become one of the best-connected families in the county. All might have been expected to attend the burial service of Anne Dudley.

Anne's procession passed through an ornate archway supported by two columned pillars. The corpse was placed upon a bier under the chancel arch, which separated the nave – containing the laypeople – from the area around the altar, which was reserved for the clergy. Anne's body, like her soul, hovered in a place between this world and the next. Her mourners' prayers, and those that would be said in her honour in the coming months and years, would help ensure that her soul entered Heaven and escaped the torments of Purgatory. Those who prayed for her, however, still had to face the tortures of this world. Above the bier, decorating the chancel arch were grotesque stone birds, with tongues protruding and wide, saucer-like eyes. They stared down at Anne's mourners. Faith was not meant to be a comfortable experience. Religion sought to unsettle even as it consoled.

This world, with its pestilence, violence and various temptations, was a prison. Remembering that would help lift one to the ultimate escape of Heaven.

Much of the church was draped in black. Gone was the colourful altar cloth that Anne's father-in-law, John Dudley, had donated to the church on his death, embroidered with the Dudley arms. John had dearly loved his daughter-in-law. In his will he had left her gold from which to design a chain in whatever fashion she so chose. When she died, the chain would pass to her daughter, his granddaughter, the 'little Elizabeth' as he affectionately called her.[9] John might not have predicted that this would happen so soon after his own death; Elizabeth was still an infant at her mother's burial. She was unlikely to remember anything about her mother as she grew up.

The members of the procession took their places as the priest called on the mercy of God. At the appointed time, the deacon advanced with his censer of incense, wafting billowing smoke on either side of Anne's body, which dispersed into the nave and filled the church. When those present retired home, after the burial feast, they would be reminded of the ceremony by the thick smell of incense on their clothes as they undressed.

The first reading was offered to comfort those who mourned Anne's early and unexpected death: 'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope', a theme repeated by the three clerks standing at the head of the wrapped body: 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, O Lord. Thy rod and thy staff comfort me.'[10]

Saint Augustine, whose works Edmund had scoured as a youth, had written that funerals were more for the living than for the dead. Anne's death was early and unexpected, and her husband, for all his education and noble lineage, found himself in a precarious situation. He was approaching forty and he had no wife or male heir, just a daughter who was still young enough to succumb to the many ailments and illnesses common to that time of life. It was true that he had represented the Sussex town of Lewes in the king's parliament and was undersheriff of London, a deputy performing some of the

legal duties of the sheriff, including hearing cases in London's courts.[11] He had also won modest renown amongst his academically inclined friends for his ability to debate the nuances and intricacies of the law, including the Crown's right to challenge private authorities and jurisdictions.[12] He was becoming an established local landowner, and agent of the Crown in his own county, but was still far from a source of any real political power.

As the service ended, the assembly proceeded into the churchyard to where the priest had marked the grave that morning, now a rectangular wound in the earth several feet deep. They watched as Anne's body was lowered into the fresh grave. The priest gathered a handful of earth, throwing it on her corpse in the shape of the cross, like that he had drawn hours before: 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'.[13] The ritual was one of the many reminders surrounding Edmund that he too would meet this fate, sooner or later. The only way to overcome death in this world was through family or fame. Standing by the open grave of his wife, Edmund Dudley had neither.

*

Sixty-five miles to the north, in the sprawling city of London, King Henry VII's worries were much like those of Edmund Dudley. He too had recently buried his wife, though Queen Elizabeth's funeral was substantially grander than that of Anne Dudley. Hundreds of common folk and nobles had witnessed the procession along torch-lined streets from the Tower of London to Westminster Abbey to mark the death of the White Rose of England.[14] By her marriage almost twenty years before to Henry of Richmond, the Lancastrian heir, Elizabeth of York had smoothed the path to a peaceful resolution of the civil war. The grandeur of her funeral, however, did not change the worrying position in which her death had put the family.

Less than a year before, on the morning of 4 April 1502, Henry had been woken earlier than usual in his palace at Greenwich. Greenwich – or the Palace of Placentia – was one of Henry VII's building projects, and he had worked to modernize the residence over the previous five years. Although he spent much of his time elsewhere, Greenwich was the official royal residence.

Standing before the King was his grey-robed confessor, who delivered

the heart-breaking news. Henry and Elizabeth's eldest son had died, the culmination of an eight-week illness which had struck down the youth as he approached his sixteenth year. Arthur, with a name more legendary than the sickly adolescent had been able to carry, was meant to be the living manifestation of the peace brokered by his parents' marriage. Henry VII had come to the throne not long before his son's birth. He had been forced to conquer his country, winning it in battle against the previous king, Richard III, who Henry saw as a usurper. Richard had died on the battlefield, and Henry had been crowned not long after. He had quickly married Richard's niece, Elizabeth, whose father and brother had also been kings (Edward IV and the short-lived Edward V). Her claim was infinitely stronger than Henry's, except for the fact of her sex, of course. Henry's great-great-great-grandfather was King Edward III, though one had to overlook an illegitimate birth in order to draw the connection to the new king of England. For the three decades before Henry took the crown, the country had been in turmoil, as blood was spilled between the Houses of Lancaster – of which Henry VII was the heir – and that of York – to which Elizabeth his wife belonged. Their first child, Arthur, was the fulfilment of a promise of unity and peace. On him had rested the hope for the nascent dynasty, and the country.

Now Arthur was dead. On hearing the news, Henry had sent for his wife, who consoled him with the reminder of their remaining children and the possibility that they might yet have more, before collapsing in grief herself.[15] As if by prophecy, Elizabeth became pregnant not long after, but it was not the reversal of fortune for which Henry had hoped. Following a long and difficult labour, both Queen Elizabeth and her newborn daughter died. Henry was left with only three living children – and importantly, just one son, Henry– and no wife. He shut himself away from his duties and his closest advisers, disappearing into the depths of his private chambers at Richmond Palace for over a month.[16]

Locked away, he did battle with death. It was not unheard of for grief to kill a man, the heart going cold and drying out, eventually breaking.[17] It was a slow process and aged the body prematurely. The remedies were fresh air, exercise and good counsel, all of which Henry

pushed away. He was cast into a deep fever and robbed of his ability even to speak or cry out.[18] To the public, the king was 'in mourning'. Those closest to him, however, knew that the king was near death, and his heir just a little boy who was still distraught over the loss of his mother. The king, perhaps aware of the necessity of his recovery, rallied as spring broke.

When Henry emerged, he was a changed man. The king had always been close, secretive and suspicious, but heavy loss made him paranoid and obsessive. Henry had snatched the crown in bloody battle not two decades before from a king, Richard III, who had seized it from the hands of a murdered boy, Edward V, whose own father, Edward IV, had wrenched it from another slaughtered king, Henry VI, who had come to the throne as an infant. Henry had endured multiple threats against his throne, most significantly in the form of 'pretenders': frauds who claimed to be heirs to the throne with better claims than Henry's own. He had always put them down, but the unexpected deaths of his wife and daughter would weaken any man's sense of security. Officers of the king whispered that not only was their master 'weak and sickly' and 'not likely to be a long-lived man', but also that if any 'knew King Harry' as they did, they would be wise to tread carefully, for he was likely to assume that bad news 'came of envy, ill-will, and malice', turning on those who delivered it.[19]

And it was about to get worse. Throughout his reign Henry strategically refused to promote the nobles who might look to supplant him, instead elevating educated men from middling backgrounds who he could raise – and destroy – as needed.[20] One of the first and the most important was Sir Reginald Bray, whom Henry had known as a boy and relied on as a king. Bray had begun his career in the service of Henry's mother, Margaret Beaufort, gifting her young son with a bow and quiver of arrows. Bray had worked tirelessly to support Henry's invasion against Richard III and had always found ways – not always beneficent ones – to ensure the Crown was well supported financially.[21] Bray's lack of scruples made him perfect to oversee Henry's 'Council Learned in the Law', a conciliar court with no fixed membership, location or mandate, which operated outside of the official judicial system without any statutory authority.[22] Henry counted

on Bray to execute his justice as he needed and, at times, even to sell it: for instance, the £200 extracted from the widowed sister of the Queen of England to provide 'indifferent justice', something she might have hoped to receive from the courts without needing to pay for it.[23] By means of his spies and enforcers, Bray gathered information to enforce the king's prerogative, keep wayward subjects obligated to him and ensure a steady stream of revenue – with a cut off the top for himself, of course.[24] Only six months after the death of Queen Elizabeth, however, Henry lost him too.[25]

With Bray's death, Henry faced a hole in the various and wide-ranging networks protecting his reign.[26] The Earl of Suffolk, Edmund de la Pole, was threatening to invade, with the support of the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I. Pole's elder brother, John, had been the designated heir of Richard III, but had died in the midst of a rebellion two years after Henry VII's conquest, leaving his younger brother as a competing claimant to the throne. Styling himself the 'duke' rather than 'earl' of Suffolk, Pole had fled to the continent and into the waiting arms of Maximilian in 1501. A month before Bray's death in August 1503, seven men had been hanged, drawn and quartered for conspiring with Pole.[27] Bray's death, on the heels of the deaths of the queen and heir to the throne, was yet another disaster in what was surely an unravelling and vulnerable regime.

Bray had not left Henry entirely bereft, however. One of his last acts was to introduce the king to a man who – though he lacked Bray's experience – was perhaps even more knowledgeable in the skills and connections Henry needed: a wide-ranging legal knowledge of the king's prerogatives alongside connections to London informants and the city's officials.[28] If Henry could not rely on a plenitude of sons on which to establish his dynasty and avoid civil war, he would need to fortify his crown another way.[29] If his nobles would not respect his claim to the throne by claim of blood, they would need to be faithful to him through forced financial obligation.[30] What Henry needed was someone versed in the laws which would allow him to bind his subjects to him – and his son – in the incontrovertible language of coin. What – or who – the king needed was Edmund Dudley.[31]

On Thursday, 25 January 1504, the nineteenth year of the reign of King Henry VII, the king's seventh parliament was called. The opening of parliament was always a majestic affair, and the people braved the cold of a January morning to take to the streets of London to watch the king and his lords arrive at Westminster Palace.[32] The Palace of Westminster had been used as a royal residence since before the conquest of 1066, thanks to its strategic position on the Thames. It sat to the west of the City of London, requiring travel by boat from a home in the centre of the city. Parliament, the representative assembly of lords and nobles who gave their counsel and consent to the king's laws and taxes, had met at this grand palace since the thirteenth century.

The Lords, attired in their traditional red and ermine robes and crowns of nobility, processed into the chamber where the first session would be held, while the king prepared in an adjacent room.[33] They were joined there by the bishops, abbots and prelates, another twenty to thirty solemn robed men. At last, the king entered, golden sceptre in hand, and sat enthroned under a grand cloth of state. Once settled, he summoned the Commons to join them.

The House of Commons had only recently begun to take on similar power to that of the Lords. Nevertheless, refusing requests for taxation remained one of the Commons' most effective checks on monarchical power.[34] With very few exceptions (which Edmund knew well), Henry VII could not impose taxes on his subjects without the assent of the Commons. It was also an excellent place to test the temperature of public opinion.[35] If Henry wanted to shore up financial reserves, he would either have to go via the House of Commons, or cleverly circumvent it.

Amongst the cluster of the three hundred or so men who made up the Commons was Edmund Dudley.[36] It was not his first time as a member of parliament, and he recognized many of the men swarming about him. This time, however, he had a new sense of purpose, of privilege. He was to be set apart from his peers.

At the king's summons, the knights, citizens and burgesses walked into the great hall to join their monarch and the Lords. This was the Chamber of the Holy Cross, also called the Painted Chamber; the

former because it was the supposed death-place of the hallowed saint and king, Edward the Confessor, the latter because of the ornate paintings that covered every inch of the walls.[37] It was huge: standing shoulder to shoulder about 1,000 men would fit inside its walls, and still have space to manoeuvre, and it would take at least five tall men standing one on top of the other to come anywhere near the height of the ceiling.

Each wall had been divided into horizontal sections of painted scenes, about the height of a man, so that the people in them were brilliantly life-sized. Entering from the ornate doorway on the south-west side of the room, you were faced with the beginning of the story on the north wall, which you followed east to your right, and turning around, ended the story just above the door through which you'd entered.[38] As you did, you noticed that the painted story did not just evolve as you turned around the room, but from the uppermost strip to the lower as well. The stories at the highest level, the ones you strained your neck to see, were of virtuous kings, like Judas Maccabeus, the great Old Testament king. He was portrayed immediately across from the entrance, leading his troops into a walled city, slaughtering its inhabitants and the enemy underfoot. Those at the lowest level, beside the entrance, presented a clear warning about the death and perpetual humiliation of tyrannical rulers, like Antiochus IV, who after condemning the seven 'Maccabean martyrs' to brutal torture and death by boiling in oil was himself tortured by God with crippling bowel pain and a fatal fall from a speeding chariot.[39]

Death and destruction – especially in battle – was the dominant theme: men and boys killed in combat, the faithful cruelly tortured, citizens violently slaughtered. Such scenes formed an odd juxtaposition with the other paintings in the room, which portrayed scenes of quiet victory, even piety. The Virtues were gloriously illustrated on the tall window splays that punctuated the room. Depicted as women in medieval suits of armour, they serenely vanquished their opposing Vices, writhing defeated beneath them. Even more holy was the scene portrayed in the bottom right corner, just right of the large hearth and next to the king's throne. There St Edward the Confessor, in a gilded purple robe, was crowned by the bishops of the Church, holding bright

gold mitres. Edward, at the centre, was clearly the pivotal figure in the scene, but he was vastly outnumbered by the eighteen bishops, who seemed to speak and gesture approvingly amongst themselves, and the centre-most of whom placed the gilded crown upon the saintly ruler's head. On either side painted soldiers stood guard over the royal presence.

Regal piety and virtue, fierce war-like violence and the cruel punishment of the vicious, these were the scenes that met the eyes of the gathered members of parliament as they entered the presence of the king.[40]

King Henry, sat on his throne amongst the painted scenes, looked like a living manifestation of these opposed regal burdens. Painted to his left was the great Judas Maccabeus. In his youth Henry had not been unlike the young biblical king, taking back his realm by righteous force of arms. Since the death of Richard III at Bosworth, however, Henry avoided war whenever possible. Neither, though, did Henry have the pure piety of Edward the Confessor, staring at him from the wall on his right. Henry's religious policy was orthodox – heretics were burnt and the pope's authority in England upheld – though he had also placed increasingly intense financial burdens on Church institutions in order to line his own coffers.[41]

There was an observable difference between this Henry and the one who had presided over parliament seven years before.[42] Then, Henry had been triumphant and conquering, secure in his throne and his dynasty. Now – thanks particularly to the deaths of his wife and son – he teetered on the precipice of insignificance. One more tragedy could render this new and feeble dynasty nothing more than a strange and inexplicable aberration in the line of English kings. This difficult reality showed in every part of the king's person. Henry had always been slender, but now he looked drawn. This was heightened by the fact that he stood taller than most of those around him, making him seem even leaner. Grey eyes that could appear kind, or cheerful, now took on the appearance of weariness and wariness. Thin lips concealed worn teeth. He had a sallow complexion and protruding high cheekbones that gave an air of alertness and cunning. The hair that fell from under his heavy crown and brushed the shoulders of his

robes was white. He would soon be fifty, but his pinched face showed the strain of greater years.

As Edmund and the other members took their places in the Painted Chamber, a solemn-looking stout man in his early fifties, with intelligent dark eyes and long brows, stood to give his speech. This was the newly appointed Lord Chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham. Born of humble if not obscure stock, the law-educated Warham had been in royal service for well over a decade but had risen quickly in the previous few years, and indeed the last few days.[43] Warham was not an obvious choice for high promotion – he was not known for his charisma or brilliance, but he had the experience and loyalty that Henry had clearly found to be useful.[44] Appointed Lord Chancellor only days before parliament opened, Warham had become, almost overnight, the most politically powerful man in England under the king, presiding over the King's Council and the Chancery.[45] Such was a world ruled by a precarious king: fortune's wheel could turn very quickly indeed.

'Love justice, you who judge the land,' Warham proclaimed to those assembled.[46] This line of scripture was the theme of Warham's speech, the content of which was so banal as to verge on boring; Edmund would have heard many other sermons like it in his time. 'As Augustine says,' Warham continued, 'when justice has been taken away, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers?' He then exhorted those assembled to scorn not only pleasures in the pursuit of justice, but pains as well, not letting fear of prisons, chains, banishment, torture or death get in the way of the just path in the service of their country. Did a few men nervously eye the chamber's painted image of the martyrs, tongues violently ripped from their mouths before they were boiled alive?

At long last, Warham finished his speech and shifted to the first order of business. The commons had been brought together to choose from their ranks a man to speak for them, their 'Speaker'. The Speaker controlled in what order bills were read and thus could prioritize those proposals from the Crown over private bills – or vice versa – in the short period allotted to the meeting of parliament. It was an important role, and thus had to be chosen from and by the ranks of

the members themselves. Those assembled knew this for a charade, however; the Speaker had already been chosen – and not by the people.[47] The recently widowed Edmund Dudley, standing in that crowd of men before the throne, knew this powerful position was already his.

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On his formal appointment four days later, Edmund walked in procession into the Commons' chamber in the chapter house at Westminster Abbey. The chapter house was octagonal in shape, with dramatic scenes from the apocalypse played out on the walls within the grand sweeping arches.[48] Edmund's feet passed over the ornate tile floor, on which was inscribed '*Ut rosa flos florum sic est domus ista domorum*'. The inscription was centuries old, but its meaning – 'As the rose is the flower of flowers, so is this house the house of houses' – was apt for the royal dynasty brought in under Henry VII, with its symbol of the combined red and white roses.

Edmund was flanked by two of the most powerful councillors of the reign: the Treasurer, Sir John Heron, was on his right side, and the Comptroller, Sir Richard Guildford, was on his left.[49] John Heron was of an age with Edmund, though he had been in royal service since Henry VII's accession and had held the powerful post of Treasurer for over a decade. Richard Guildford, on the other hand, was approaching old age and already had an adult heir. He had been a long-time friend of Bray's, working with him to facilitate Henry VII's conquest. He had known Edmund's father, and may have also played a role in manoeuvring Edmund into his current position.[50] It was only right he stood at his side now.

Edmund approached the throne and made three deep bows to the seated king. Henry announced he was 'well satisfied' with the choice of Speaker (given it was his own) and indicated to Edmund to speak. Edmund knew what he had to say, though it may have felt a risk to say it. He forced himself to lie to the king, begging to be relieved of the heavy burden of the proffered office. Such a grand speech belied the fact that Edmund had gambled his whole legal career on this position, boldly and expensively turning down a promotion the previous autumn to serjeant-at-law, the step before becoming a judge.[51] This

was the performance every Speaker was required to make – he must not appear eager for promotion, even if desperate for it. Every king, upon hearing this speech, had always refused the request, but this precedent did not mean that the prospect of being publicly demoted was not terrifying. Fortunately for Edmund, the king confirmed his appointment – Edmund Dudley now presided over the House of Commons and was trusted by the King of England to do so in his name.[52]

Once officially recognized in his office, Edmund was seated in the Speaker's chair at the head of the room.[53] Before him was the clerks' table, where votes would be decided, picked out from the din of shouted assent or dissent. Arranged around this core were the members of the Commons, sitting on benches in no particular arrangement, though one might suspect allies and factions found each other for support. Members of the Commons, all 296 of them, were elected from their respective regions, and were there to represent the interest of their constituency.[54] Of course, Edmund knew well that it did not always work this way. Many poorer boroughs welcomed outsider representation, if they didn't have to pay them, and members of the court frequently ensured their own men were elected to the Commons, in order to have more control over what went on in the Lower House.

Most of the statutes passed were customary and of little national significance – legislating that those who did not accompany the king into war suffered financial penalties or that apprentices played at dice and cards only during the twelve days of Christmas – but Edmund needed to introduce two crucial pieces of business for the Crown during this session of parliament.[55] The first was straightforward and uncontroversial, though significant. The heir to the throne, Prince Arthur, was dead. This made his twelve-year-old brother, Henry, next-in-line, but Prince Henry had not yet been officially invested with the proper titles. Henry had grown up as Duke of York to his elder brother's Prince of Wales; his first public appearance, as a ten-year-old, was in his brother's wedding procession when Arthur married the Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon. Prince Henry had been well educated and had a genuine interest in scholarly matters. He had

been devastated – 'wounded' as the young prince put it – by his mother's death, and now had to take on the mantle of heir to the English throne.[56] There was no Duke of York to succeed him. The entire Tudor dynasty rested on this twelve-year-old's shoulders. The Commons were happy to approve the investiture of Henry as Prince of Wales: 'it hath pleased Almighty God to call the King's dearest son Henry Duke of York to be now the King's heir apparent and Prince of Wales'.[57]

The second request from the king was trickier. Prince Henry would need to be bolstered financially if the dynasty was to survive. Parliament needed to be called on to provide much of this revenue. This was always a difficult subject and could lead to all-out revolt if handled badly, as the king knew well. In 1497, Henry had sought £120,000 from parliament and had faced a nearly devastating rebellion. Tens of thousands had marched on the capital, and Henry had to recall his soldiers marching towards Scotland to deal with the peasants' army.[58] Raising funds, though necessary, was a dangerous business.

Perhaps on the advice of a certain clever lawyer well versed in the king's feudal rights and prerogatives, Henry put before the parliament his medieval right to 'reasonable aids' in paying for major royal events in an attempt to dredge up extra coin.[59] As announced to those assembled, these events were the 'making Knight of the right noble Prince his first begotten son Arthur late Prince of Wales deceased', an event which had occurred almost two decades earlier in 1489, and the marriage of Henry's daughter, Margaret, to the King of Scots, which had occurred the previous year.[60] Though it was also added that 'his Highness hath sustained and borne great and inestimable charges for the defence of this his Realm', it was a blatant attempt on the king's part to revive his regal rights as feudal overlord and squeeze money out of his subjects.[61] Henry perhaps hoped that the members would be too sensitive to Arthur's recent death to raise objections to the request. They had no such qualms.

No matter how much the request was phrased in the language of the king's ancient rights and the protection of the realm, it was exorbitant and unwelcome. Edmund presided over a ferocious debate. In the end, the Commons agreed to hand over £40,000, less than half of

what the king seemed to expect.[62] Edmund had done well to get the king even this much, but it was clear that parliament would not be providing the extra coin the king sought to protect his young son's reign.[63] Henry stated clearly that he did not intend to call another parliament for as long as he could manage without. Both Edmund Dudley and Andrew Windsor were named as commissioners to collect the funds, allowing them to take money from the collection to pay for their own 'costs, expenses and charge'.[64] It was becoming increasingly clear to Edmund how to serve the king and oneself – including one's family – in the same stroke.

As rumours of the debate and the king's attempt to shake coin out of parliament were whispered around the city, it was reported that the king – and Edmund – were defeated by the arguments of a 'beardless boy', a city lawyer in his mid-twenties by the name of Thomas More.[65] The gossips of London were seldom kind, but Edmund was not particularly inclined to ingratiate himself. Let tongues wag. He was the king's man.

*

Elizabeth Grey, recently Elizabeth Dudley, screamed in the Great Parlour of her grand London home. She was in labour, her pregnancy coming not long after her marriage to the rising lawyer, Edmund Dudley. The daughter of a late Viscount and descended from a host of noble families, including Lisle, Beauchamp, Talbot and Grey, Elizabeth was above Edmund in social standing.[66] His recent elevation in the king's favour, however, had made him a viable suitor for a young heiress.[67] Now Elizabeth, in her early twenties, needed to safely deliver a male heir to the Dudleys' rising good fortune and favour. Another daughter, like the motherless 'Little Elizabeth', would not be enough. Though Edmund's first wife had been buried sixty miles away, reminders of her and Edmund's roots in Sussex were all around Elizabeth Dudley. Her new home at Candlewick Street, just east of St Paul's Cathedral, was adjacent to a parish church under the control of the prior of Tortington, where Anne had been buried.[68] Elizabeth, straining and crying, needed to pray she would not soon join her predecessor.

Of all the rooms in their large home at Candlewick Street, the Great Parlour was the only one that met all the requirements for a

birthing room.[69] There was a fireplace to heat water and the chamber – the mother must not be allowed to get cold – and it was large enough to house all the women who needed to be present, Elizabeth's friends and kinswomen and her midwife, who shouted orders and encouragement.[70] Childbirth was terrifying; both mother and child could die in a state of unconfessed sin and agonizing pain. For Elizabeth's comfort and safety, there were prayers, especially to the Virgin Mary, whose sinless condition resulted in the painless delivery of the Messiah. There were also prayers to St Margaret, who was eaten by a dragon but spat back out, in the hopes that the newborn would emerge as effortlessly as Margaret went hurtling out of the dragon. Elizabeth could also take comfort in various talismans and relics brought to her by the women who surrounded her. Prayer rolls could be wrapped girdle-like around her belly or encased in amulets at her ankle or knee.[71] The Flemish printer Wynkyn de Worde sold birthing girdles with printed prayers on them at his shop on Fleet Street, a short walk away. These prayers, 'Christ calls you child + come out + come out + Christ conquers + Christ rules + Christ is lord', could also be chanted rhythmically as Elizabeth panted and strained.[72]

There was other help for Elizabeth as well. Books like the medieval *Trotula* advised herbal remedies for the pains of childbirth, such as a concentrated liquor of fenugreek, laurel, flax and fleawort.[73] Sweet-smelling smoke – of aloewood, mint, oregano – could be produced, but was not for the mother's nose; instead it was fanned between her open legs. For reasons unknown to midwives, it seemed to help if the mother held a magnet in her right hand, drank ivory shavings, or had coral around her neck. Potions could also be made from the white excrement of a hawk, or water which had been used to wash dissected parts of a firstborn swallow. It might be God's will whether mother and child survived this ordeal, but Elizabeth had copious instructions for what, nevertheless, might help things along.

At last, Elizabeth's screams subsided. In the silence, another's took her place. Edmund's wife had given birth to a healthy son. Quickly, the baby's ears were pressed, ensuring that nothing foul entered them. The umbilical cord was tied, ideally at a distance of three fingers from the belly; a practice said to ensure a well-sized male member

(it was never too early for such precautions). To be certain that the child would speak at a young age, his palate would be anointed with honey and his little nose with warm water from the pot by the fire. He was wrapped in tight cloths to straighten and massage his limbs. As the doors and windows were at last opened, welcoming in light and air from outside, his eyes would be covered to protect him from the harsh light.[74] The baby boy was to be christened John, sharing his name with Edmund's father and grandfather, as well as Elizabeth's own grandfather, through whom her child might one day inherit her family's title of Viscount Lisle.

Walking through the long gallery of Candlewick, overlooking the garden he shared with the prior of Tortington, Edmund could begin to feel the security he was building for himself and his growing family. Edmund had a son, and the promise of more to follow. What's more, the king's increasing insecurity provided opportunity for Edmund to step in, applying his talents, experience and contacts to meet the king's needs and desires. As faithful instrument of the king's will, enforcer of the king's laws and prerogatives, Edmund could hope to rise. The only way to overcome death in this world was through family or fame. Standing by the cradle of his newborn son, Edmund Dudley had his sights on both.

2
Two ravening wolves

Sir William Clopton approached the entryway at Candlewick Street nervously, his shallow breath appearing like smoke in the air before him.[1] He was in his fifties and entering a colder time of life; it was no wonder that the chill made him ache in ways it had not when he was young. It was not his first time at the large home on Candlewick Street, dealing with the king's newly made royal councillor.[2] Previously, he had left cornered but hopeful. Today, he just wanted the whole ordeal over with. He had brought a simple property arbitration to the Exchequer of Pleas, a court designed to settle issues of equity presided over by the Barons of the Exchequer. He had been close to being awarded restitution when Edmund Dudley had suddenly intervened, interrupting proceedings. Dudley, a full decade younger than the knight, told him that he would not receive a penny, not even enough to cover the costs of the case, unless he promised that a full half of it would be paid directly to the king. Dudley had put a steep price on justice, but Clopton had seen no way out. He agreed.

He had returned to the Exchequer the next day, and called for immediate judgement, assured he had bought an outcome in his favour. His opponent in the case, Thomas Stanley, the Earl of Derby, however, was not interested in being a pawn in Dudley's plan. A young man with a protruding chin and sharp glance, Stanley had inherited his title only a few months before. He moved quickly. Interrupting proceedings and pulling Clopton aside, Stanley offered the value of 200 marks, or £132, if Clopton settled the case immediately.

Clopton once again agreed. Now, he just needed to convince Edmund to take the settlement. And so he journeyed to Candlewick Street, Stanley's agreement in hand.

He was joined by his friend and neighbour, Sir Robert Drury, a royal councillor and experienced lawyer, to back him up. Drury, of an age with Clopton, had been a Speaker in Parliament, like Edmund, and his career, though not progressing as rapidly, was not dissimilar. If anyone could speak reason to Edmund Dudley, surely it would be Drury.

Dudley's home was a large two-storey merchant's house, located just two streets north of the busy River Thames, at the corner of Walbrook and Candlewick Streets. Across the street from his home stood the legendary London Stone, a block of limestone about the size of a large chest, said to date back to the first kings of England. 'Candlewick' was one of the first homes in London to contain a long gallery, designed to allow one to take recreation in inclement weather; its size also facilitated private whispered conversation.[3] The hangings on the wall were of red and green vertical stripes, called 'paly', and the two windows were curtained with green say, a delicate twilled woollen fabric. On the wall opposite the windows stood the fireplace, which warmed the gallery against the chill outside. The room was furnished simply, but as necessary, with a table, bench and chair, the last clearly meant for Edmund himself. There was also a coffer, a strong box, in which Edmund kept the bills and evidence he needed to do his work.

Edmund Dudley dressed plainly but fashionably: black with hints of crimson, a flash of gold or silver woven through the cloth. The black reminded those around him that he was a trained man of law. The expensive fur that lined his gowns was a reminder of his wealth. It was sombre yet expensive and painted a picture of quiet ambition.

Edmund watched the two men approach. He had been given strict instructions in this case to get at least 300 marks for the king. This could be easily done; he had full control of the court and the promise of payment from Clopton. If Clopton didn't cooperate, he was sure that the young, presumably malleable, Stanley would. The king required the money, and he would get it.

Clopton approached Edmund and showed him the agreement he

had struck. A settlement of 200 marks meant only 100 marks for the king. This was not enough. Dudley offered Clopton a choice: 'If you take fifty marks and go on your way, and let me continue the suit in the Exchequer, you can have your fifty marks, or else you'll have never a penny.' It was not a good deal, at least not if you were Sir William Clopton.

Drury stepped forward to intercede on his friend's behalf. 'Considering the king's grace had no right but by the grant of William,' he interjected, 'the end that William has taken with the Earl of Derby should stand.'

Edmund was taken aback. The king had 'no right'? Who was Drury to lecture him on the king's rights? 'Are you of the king's council,' he retorted, 'and will argue against the king's advantage?' Drury was indeed a member of the king's council, a knight and chief steward to the Earl of Oxford. An upstart lawyer with no title should have afforded him more respect. Edmund did not.

Ignoring Drury, Edmund returned to Clopton once again. 'Be not so hardy,' he cautioned, 'that you make any end but continue your said suit in the Exchequer, as you will eschew the king's displeasure.' The stark warning ended any further conversation. The two men left Candlewick, walking back out into the cold, bustling streets of London, outmanoeuvred by Dudley. As long as Edmund wielded the weapon of the king's pleasure, no man or men could defeat him.

Edmund wasted little time in going directly to the Earl of Derby. With Stanley he privately negotiated the settlement of 300 marks, all of which went straight to the king. As he had threatened, not a penny went to Clopton. Dudley later went on to fine Clopton a further £200, without recording a reason. Neither Drury nor Clopton would forget the encounter, or its lessons. The black-robed lawyer was a force to be reckoned with.

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Clopton and Drury were not the only such visitors Edmund saw at Candlewick. Almost overnight his home had become a hub of activity. Parliament had ended in April of 1504, and on 9 September, shortly before the Clopton case, Edmund had begun his account books on behalf of the king. Two days later he officially became a

royal councillor. He was tasked with collecting money on the king's behalf, through whatever means the law – or Edmund's dexterous interpretation of it – allowed. So it was that there was a steady stream of people in and out of Candlewick. Like so many of the London shops, marketplaces and alehouses, for Edmund his house was both a home and a workplace.

There, Edmund met those who had been summoned to enter into 'bonds' to the king, committing money they might never pay in a financial expression of binding loyalty, as well as those whose bonds needed paying. It was also where he met with his 'informers' or 'promoters'. These men were royal agents, who walked the streets of London, sat in its law courts and listened for gossip on the wind, hoping to sniff out cases that could be exploited to the king's benefit and – more specifically – profit. One's bond to keep the peace might mean the forfeiture of hundreds of pounds to the king, if a promoter discovered that the person in question was implicated in a crime and passed that knowledge on to Dudley. Some, like the Italian John Baptist Grimaldi, had been at it for decades, and were highly skilled.

Grimaldi, a Genoan merchant who had arrived in London under King Richard III, had long been called a 'wretch' by London citizens for his willingness to inform upon them. Londoners knew well that Genoans were cheaters; the trick was to avoid looking them directly in the eyes; if you did, they had you.[4] Among Grimaldi's victims was none other than the respected draper and Sheriff of London, William Capel, who in 1496 had been fined nearly £3,000 thanks to information passed on by Grimaldi.[5] Also long-active and reviled in the city was John Camby, a grocer and officer of the Sheriff, who almost lost his job when it was rumoured that he conducted a 'wayward' second life, running a brothel by the Thames. Dudley, however, secured him a position in the London customs house, as well as running the Poultry Yard Prison, ironically where those convicted of offences related to prostitution often ended up.[6] Such men as Grimaldi and Camby could be frequently seen at Candlewick, passing on any news they had gleaned to Edmund. These associations did not endear Edmund Dudley to the people of London, nor to the court, but they did help him perform his office for the king.

Once the business of meeting with petitioners, penitents and promoters had ended for the day, Edmund moved his books and coin purses safely into the closet within the great chamber of the house. Through his hands moved sovereigns, groats, angels and other coins, with the king's head hammered on one side. In minting his coins, Henry VII had ensured that not only was he represented, but that the image was a clear likeness. As his reign had worn on, he had changed the nature of the image, so that it was just his profile that appeared. Rather than staring directly at the owner of the coin, Henry VII simply glanced at them sidelong.[7]

Most of the money that flowed through Dudley's account books was in pounds and marks. A 'mark' was not a coin, but a weighted measure that came to a value of two thirds of a pound. Not long before Dudley began his collections, Henry had issued a new coin – the 'sovereign' – a large gold coin worth the value of one silver pound. A pound was made up of twenty shillings or one hundred and twenty pennies. The carpenters, bricklayers and other skilled craftsmen of London could expect about eight pennies a day for their labours, maybe a bit more if they weren't given meals, quite a bit less if they happened to be women.[8] Servants and labourers would look for about five pennies a day. A golden sovereign was worth at least three weeks' work for most of the labouring population of London; they would be unlikely to take home more than £20 in a year. Dudley's bonds and debts for hundreds of pounds were thus each a small fortune, all passing through Candlewick before making their way to the king's coffers.

That was not to say that Dudley and the king did not deal in small change. On one day in February 1509, Henry VII made £5,000 worth of payments to eleven different individuals in over one million pennies, in an attempt to rid his treasury of all the small change he had accumulated over the years, much of it having passed through Edmund Dudley's chamber closet.[9]

Edmund's work life was relegated to the small closet in the grand chamber; the rest of the room was much more intimate. In the large bedroom, he and Elizabeth shared a grand featherbed. When it was cold, as it was the day Cloptou came to visit, they could pull their

beautifully embroidered quilt from the large, two-lidded coffer in the chamber, to keep them warm in the night.

In this large featherbed Edmund and Elizabeth engaged in the 'chamber game', as a popular poem called it (it was no accident that the woman in the poem referred to it instead as 'chamber work').[10] As the daughter of a noble house, Elizabeth would have been expected to be a virgin on the marriage market, and Edmund to teach her all she needed to know about the goings-on of the bedroom. She knew that women were expected to be the passive recipients of their husbands' sexual affections, all in the hopes of producing children. Sex within marriage should be purposeful and practical, as well as regulated by the festivals of the Church.[11] It was to be avoided during Lent, all holy days, as well as when the wife was ill, menstruating, pregnant and before she was 'churched'.* Days when the Church actually approved of the sexual activities of married couples were few and far between and needed to be taken advantage of. 'Excessive' marital sex had been condemned by the Church Father St Jerome as equivalent to adultery.[12] This not only included the frequency of sexual activity, but the positions used and the ardour involved. Even engaging in sexual activity outside of the bed itself could have dire consequences.[13] Transgression could result in harm to the child, not only death but also deformation.

That all being said, it was common knowledge that a woman's enjoyment of the chamber game aided conception. Since women's privy parts were the inversion of men's, it followed that their climax would be just as important for conception.[14] Husbands like Edmund ought to tickle, tease and stoke the flame of their wives' desire if they wanted children. It was only 'chamber work' when husbands neglected to do so.

Edmund and Elizabeth did well at the chamber game; Elizabeth became pregnant again not long after she had given birth to their eldest, John. When the second child was born, Edmund and Elizabeth chose the uncommon name of Jerome for him. Jerome was less physically

* Churching was a ceremony taking place after childbirth, blessing the new mother and giving thanks for her survival.

capable than his brother and needed assistance in meeting the needs of life. Edmund decided he was best suited for a career in the Church.[15] His name certainly alluded to the life of a scholarly saint, but might also make one think of St Jerome's precautions against excessive or untraditional sexual activity and its consequences.

Edmund and Elizabeth could speak freely, openly and even equally to each other within their private room.[16] Elizabeth could offer advice to her husband about his political trajectory, the cases before him, or the men he'd surrounded himself with. Although Edmund's grandfather had experience of court circles, Elizabeth's family could claim even more intimate connections, and thus her family's experience might be of use to Edmund. Elizabeth's uncle had been Sir John Grey, whose wife had been Elizabeth Woodville, later Edward IV's queen. The royal couple had married secretly; one of the few in attendance was Elizabeth Dudley's grandmother. The Grey family had remained close – scandalously close – to the reins of power throughout Edward's reign. On her mother's side, Elizabeth carried noble blood. Her mother had been heir to the Viscount Lisle. Through her, Elizabeth's great-great-great-grandfather was Richard Beauchamp, the Earl of Warwick. His son's position had been elevated to Duke of Warwick, and his granddaughter had reached even further, briefly becoming Queen of England, thanks to her marriage to King Richard III. As Elizabeth Dudley's eldest son, John would need to understand his place in this proud family history, tracing names and lines on parchment, and the claim he could one day make to titles such as Viscount Lisle and, even more impressive, that of Earl of Warwick, with its symbol of the bear, chained to a ragged staff.

There were other chambers in the house, on the other side of the courtyard, two of which were perfectly sized for nurseries. 'Little Elizabeth' was approaching the age at which she would move from the loose gowns of childhood to the bodices, sleeves and skirts of adulthood. Her stepmother would teach her the necessary skills and virtues of a young lady – the love of children and husband, discretion, chastity, obedience, as well as the knowledge of tasks around the household, such as washing, brewing, baking and dressing meat.[17] Her father had already arranged a marriage for her, to be solemnized when she was of

a proper age. Elizabeth's small hand had been exchanged for the return of land which Dudley had seized from the nobleman, Lord Stourton. To get his land back, the childless lord was persuaded to affiance his eldest nephew to Edmund Dudley's daughter. If she were very lucky, and her future husband inherited the lordship, one day she could style herself 'Elizabeth, Lady Stourton'. Until then, she helped her new mother with the running of the house and practised the art of being a lady.

The day at Candlewick began a little before dawn and – following morning prayers – the work of the household began with it. Although urban life meant avoiding the farm-work associated with rural living, there was still much to be done in the household, most of it by the handful of servants they employed, overseen by the higher-ranking servants, such as Elizabeth's serving-woman, Lettice Brownd, and Edmund's clerk, Thomas Mitchell.[18] Daily tasks included sweeping the rushes, which protected the floor from dirt and spills, waking and caring for the children, ensuring that bread was baked, ale was brewed, butter and cheese were made, clothing was stitched and hemmed, and that there were meals available for the household. The most important meal was dinner, served just before midday. This would be held in the great hall, a room downstairs near the entryway. Here little Elizabeth would sit with her stepmother and father, when he was not away on business, other members of the family and honoured guests, on the dais at the far end of the rectangular room, backed by a great tapestry. On either side of the table on the dais were two more long tables with benches on either side, where the rest of the household could sit to eat.

Often joining them on the dais was little Elizabeth's grandmother, Lady Elizabeth Lytton, who held a simple room in Candlewick. After the death of young Elizabeth's grandfather in 1485, her grandmother had married Sir Robert Lytton, the Keeper of the Wardrobe. He too had died, and Lady Lytton had found herself a home, at least on occasion, with the Dudley family. This meant that Elizabeth's uncles, Andrew and Anthony, could also be expected to visit. Andrew Windsor and Edmund Dudley continued to make a formidable pair; Andrew had been given his stepfather's position of Keeper of the

Wardrobe after his death. While Edmund filled in his account books with obligations, bonds and payments to the king, Andrew likewise populated the wardrobe accounts with various expenditures and gifts.

This extended family and its household were served grand dinners from the kitchen and buttery, where servants worked at no fewer than eleven spits – seven large and four small – cooking every variety of meat and fish. They prepared smaller victuals in the nine pans of various sizes, and stews and soups in the two large pots, stirred by large brass ladles. Another eight smaller pots were used for sauces and gravies. The wine which they poured with dinner was kept in the buttery: several hogsheads each containing 300 litres of wine.

The house was perfectly positioned to make the most of the diverse foodstuffs that came into London daily. If you exited the house and headed north up Walbrook, you would first pass Bucklersbury, the home of Thomas More, before finding yourself on the eastern end of Cheapside. It was in Cheapside that you could locate all the essentials – and a few luxuries – necessary for running a household such as Candlewick. Cheapside had got its name from the Old English 'ceapan', or 'to buy', and had retained its function for hundreds of years. Heading west, shopping basket in hand, you passed Ironmonger Lane, Bread Street, Milk Street, Wood Street and so on, all named after the provisions you could purchase from the sellers peddling their wares loudly from the house-fronts. It wasn't long before you could see the great St Paul's Cathedral looming before you. Beyond that was the limit of the city, marked by the long wall that encircled it.

Edmund was often required to continue this journey west, usually by boat, to the palace of Westminster, where parliament was held, and even further along the Thames, about ten miles, to Richmond, Henry VII's preferred royal residence. Though the court was itinerant, King Henry and his court spent much of their time at Richmond. The palace had begun as a manor house, which had become a royal residence in the fourteenth century and had been granted, more recently, to Queen Elizabeth Woodville – Elizabeth Dudley's royal kinswoman – during the reign of Edward IV. While Henry's family celebrated Christmas at Richmond in 1497, a violent fire had ripped through the building, originating in the king's private apartments. It brought

down the large roofbeams and tapestries that decorated the halls and chambers, as well as destroying the clothing and many of the jewels that were kept there. It had, as well, almost been the end of the king's reign. The king and his family had been forced to rapidly escape the fire as it burned through their home. Nursemaids frantically grabbed Prince Henry and his two sisters and pulled them through the smoke to safety. The king, however, took the disaster in his stride, and decided to turn it into an opportunity to build a grander and far more modern palace on the site.

When the new palace was completed in 1501 it was a marvel. Built of brick and white stone, it shone in the summer sun next to the Thames. It was studded with near-countless octagonal towers and decorated with ornate brickwork chimneys. It was entirely in line with the architectural fashions of the time, and significantly less flammable than the manor house that had preceded it. There were long galleries to display not only tapestries, but the sculpture and portraiture of the Renaissance as well. Henry had had the opportunity to show off his new palace in 1501 when his heir, Prince Arthur, had wed Catherine of Aragon, daughter of the powerful Spanish monarchs King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. Now, following the death of her husband, Catherine was trapped at glistening Richmond, a prisoner of unfortunate circumstance in one of its immaculate modern towers overlooking the Thames.[19]

Edmund Dudley was not a part of the inner workings of the court, though he would have heard every word of the gossip that made its way from Richmond Palace, largely because he had men amongst the king's servants; Hugh Denys, the groom of the stool, increasingly in charge of the king's quotidian financial matters, was Dudley's man.[20] Edmund would have been aware of the prince's rejection of any marriage contract with Catherine of Aragon in 1505, and the fire that started up in the king's chamber at Richmond – yet again – in January. Through the harsh winter, he would have been informed of the – quite accidental – visit of Archduke Philip, and the festivities that came with it, and heard the whisperings of Londoners when the golden eagle fell from the weathervane of St Paul's on to the Inn of the Black Eagle; it was surely an ill omen.[21] By July 1506 Edmund had been made

President of the King's Council, joining the ranks of the king's closest advisers in an institution that had grown in importance over the course of Henry's reign, and where the most crucial matters to the Crown were discussed.[22] The President of the Council oversaw the judicial sessions of the Council, including that of the Star Chamber, a role to which Dudley was well suited.[23]

Dudley's promotion fell closely on the heels of yet another near disaster at Richmond, when the king and the prince were almost killed by the collapse of the gallery as they walked along it. The king had his carpenter imprisoned, but the gossip of malevolent portents continued. Perhaps this new reign was destined for failure after all. Perhaps God was displeased with the king's closeness to men such as Edmund Dudley and, through him, promoters like Grimaldi and Camby. Dudley had become a grim spectre to the inhabitants of London, his agents haunting the streets, seeking out information that could add coin to the king's coffers, even if it meant the destruction of entire families. Little could be done to keep these spirits at bay: secrets always resurfaced in Henry VII's London, exacting fierce and often blind revenge.

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Above the rolling Thames, the small body of a newborn infant fell quickly and silently through the air. When it collided with the murky waters, it made such a small noise that one might have thought it had not hit the water at all, but remained floating forever above the waves, weightless as well as lifeless.

Before long, the case was before the courts. Agnes Sunnyff, wife of the wealthy merchant haberdasher Thomas Sunnyff, was accused of the death of the child, though quickly acquitted.[24] There was little reason for a respected merchant's wife to dispose of the body of a child without a proper Christian burial. Some wondered why anyone had turned to the esteemed Sunnyffs at all in relation to the case, which clearly had more to do with the sordid world of prostitution and crime on the banks of the Thames than that of respected merchants.

By March 1507, it was clear to all those with an eye on this particularly juicy tale that the much-reviled promoter John Camby had more than just a peripheral role to play. Camby had taken and

imprisoned Alice Damston, the Sunnyffs' servant, forcing her into further accusations against her master and mistress, and his servant had been tasked with continuing to spread the rumour that it was the Sunnyffs who were behind it all. When Thomas Sunnyff, catching wind of it, had confronted the promoter, Camby refused outright to end his campaign against him. Instead, he demanded £500 from the merchant.

Sunnyff had signed a bond for that amount a year before, promising to keep the peace in London.[25] The accusations against his wife – which Camby himself had fuelled – potentially represented a transgression of that promise. Camby had come, as one of Dudley's men, to retrieve the money. The people of London saw it for the 'facing' (brow-beating) and 'polling' (extortion) that it was, but this did not stop Camby from continuing to hunt down his prey in the hopes of a £500 prize for Dudley and his king.

Sunnyff was not so easily faced, however, and so took his case to Sir Richard Empson. A lawyer in his fifties, Empson also had a reputation for sniffing out money that could be collected for the king. He too had followed the well-trod path of studying the law and acting as Speaker of the Commons, though this had been over a decade before Edmund held the post. Empson had begun his political career under Edward IV, and by the 1490s had a reputation as one of Henry VII's 'low-born and evil counsellors', as named by the pretender to the throne, Perkin Warbeck in 1497 in a move that was surely intended to accrue popularity amongst Londoners.[26] It was well known in London that the court composer himself, William Cornysh, had written a satire aimed at Empson and his attempts to use the law in his favour.[27]

Sunnyff explained his predicament to Empson. Unfortunately for Sunnyff, Dudley had got to Empson first. 'You must go to prison,' Empson calmly informed him, 'for the certain matter that was laid to your wife's charge.' Rather than granting his appeal, Empson had Sunnyff committed to the Fleet for his perceived transgression of the law and his bond.

Fleet Prison was located by the city wall, just to the east of Sunnyff's home at Lud Gate, on the banks of the River Fleet. First built in the twelfth century, the Fleet was largely a debtor's prison; its

prisoners either found means to gather the money to pay their debts from inside its walls, or died there. The prison was under the wardship of the Babington family, to whom the prisoners were forced to pay rent as well as small fees for various other services.[28] If one arrived already in dire financial straits, a visit to the Fleet Prison would not solve anything.

Sunnyff had six weeks to stew in the Fleet; surely he would now agree to pay the money to the king. Edmund had him summoned to the palace at Greenwich, where he was attending to business for the king.

Sunnyff was taken by the Warden of Fleet Prison along the Thames to meet Edmund in one of the chambers he used for such purposes. When he arrived, Edmund immediately enquired whether Camby had accompanied him. Realizing that he had not, Dudley refused to see him, and so Sunnyff waited. When Camby at last arrived, he was quick to ask Sunnyff if he had spoken to Dudley. Sunnyff denied it, and Camby gave him another chance to pay the £500 and be done with it. Sunnyff refused. Camby left him waiting there and went in to speak with Edmund alone.

When they emerged back into the hall, Edmund spoke to Sunnyff. The situation was very clear: 'Sunnyff,' he told him, 'agree with the king, or else you must go to the Tower.'

The merchant held his ground, though it was slipping beneath him. 'It was not the king's will,' he boldly retorted, 'that I should yield myself guilty of the thing that I was never guilty of.'

Sunnyff was in an even lesser position to dictate the nature of the king's will to Edmund Dudley than Drury had been. Edmund turned to Camby and commanded him to make good on his threat: to take the haberdasher directly to the Tower of London. The pair left Edmund's presence and walked back to the boat, still floating on the Thames. When they went to board, Camby ordered the Fleet Prison Warden out of the boat; he would take Sunnyff himself. The warden, wary, replied that he required a discharge for a man still his prisoner. 'My word shall be sufficient discharge,' Camby answered with cool authority, and the warden stepped back.

Camby took the oars. Before long they reached the Tower of

London, looming over the Thames. Sunnyff steeled himself for entry into a place where so few left alive. To his shock, but not necessarily his relief, Camby continued rowing, gliding right past it. When he asked Camby why they had not gone in, Camby responded that the gates had already shut. Sunnyff glanced at the imposing gate through which a small boat like theirs could slide. It was very clearly open. But Camby stood firm; he would take Sunnyff back to his own home for the evening and take him to the Tower in the morning. Camby locked Sunnyff in a chamber. He did not let him out for almost a month.

While Sunnyff lay imprisoned in Camby's home, the court proceedings with regard to the death of the child continued. Alice Damston had remained in her own imprisonment, but without Camby there to intimidate her, she was ready to come forward and admit that she had slandered the Sunnyffs. 'My master nor my mastress never knew of the birth nor the death of the child, but it was dead born,' she declared publicly. It was a bombshell.

When news of this reached Camby, he exploded with rage at those he blamed for empowering Alice Damston in this way, screaming that they were harlots.[29] He immediately sought Alice out, and demanded that she testify that Agnes Sunnyff was the one who killed the child. She was to announce that she had been coerced into her previous recantation.

Appearing once again in court, Alice Damston repeated Camby's words: Agnes Sunnyff had killed the young child. Edmund Dudley was present that day, to see if Camby's efforts would yield fruit. Under questioning, however, Alice's story broke down. Camby had not prepared her sufficiently, and her account wandered and contradicted itself. Edmund was unconvinced, as were the judges. Agnes Sunnyff was acquitted of the murder. Camby was failing.

Yet he would not release Thomas Sunnyff, not without the £500 that he had evidently committed himself to retrieving for Dudley. When Sunnyff demanded to know why he and his wife had been made to suffer in this way, Camby informed him simply that the king desired the money. Sunnyff protested, 'If the King's good grace knew the truth of my matter, he would not take a penny of me.' Frustrated with his stubborn prisoner, Camby had Sunnyff and his wife transferred to