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LADY ARBELLA STUART AND EAST BARNET



From time to time local and national history come together and find their way into our record books. Arbella Stuart's remarkable escape in April 1611 was such an event. This bulletin tells what the writer believes to be the true story and the part played by a house in East Barnet, which is commemorated in the name of one of its roads.

Arbella Stuart was born in 1575 to Charles and Elizabeth Stuart. Charles' parents were Margaret and Matthew Stuart, Earl and Countess of Lennox. He was the great grandson of Henry VII and the younger brother of Lord Darnley, the husband of Mary Queen of Scots. Elizabeth Stuart (nee Cavendish) was the daughter of Bess of Hardwick and her second husband Sir William Cavendish, whom she married in about 1545 and by whom she had six children. Sir William died in 1557. Bess married her fourth husband, George Talbot, Earl of

Shrewsbury in 1568. One of her aims in marrying Shewsbury was to ensure good marriages for her children and shortly before the wedding two, Henry and Mary, married two of William's children and shortly afterwards two of her sons William and Charles were married to suitable heiresses. Just Elizabeth remained to be found a husband, her daughter Temperance having died young. In the February of the following year Mary Queen of Scots was put in Shrewsbury's care at their home, Tutley and Bess's hopes for her family were to become even more ambitious.

Mary Queen of Scots had been transferred from the care of Sir Francis Knollys at Bolton to that of the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury at Tutbury, arriving there on 4th February 1569. She was to remain in Shrewsbury's care for fourteen years. A mutual interest in needlework had brought about a friendship between Mary and Bess, much to the William's discomfort. Mary was moved to Shewsbury's manor at Wingfield and then on to Chatsworth. Whilst there her mother-in-law, the Countess of Lennox, although forbidden to visit Mary, stopped on a journey north at the estate of the Dowager Duchess of Suffolk near to a Shrewsbury owned estate, Rufford Abbey where Bess and her daughter Catherine were staying. Bess invited both the Dowager Duchess and the Countess, who was accompanied by her son Charles, to stay at Rufford. Lady Lennox was unwell and took to her bed and the two young people, Charles Stuart and Elizabeth were thrown together and a quiet and somewhat hasty marriage took place. The Queen was outraged and both Bess and Margaret Lennox were summoned to court to explain. They were both confined to the Tower. Bess was released following an inquiry but it was not until October 1575 that Lady Lennox was released by which time Arbella had been born.

Arbella was therefore cousin to King James IV of Scotland and an equally qualified aspirant for the English throne. Elizabeth had brought Arbella to the court at the age of 12. For a year she was treated as a member of the royal family before being sent back to the care of her grandmother at Hardwick Hall. It has been suggested that, towards the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, the Pope had been involved with a plan

to put Arbella on the throne and marry her to the brother of the Duke of Parma and James was very aware of the threat she represented to his security.

When Elizabeth I died in 1603 Arbella was at Hardwick Hall and although invited to be a principal mourner at her funeral declined to do so. She was moved from Hardwick Hall to Wrest Park in Bedfordshire, and put in the temporary custody of Henry Grey, the fifth Earl. Despite James' concerns she became godmother to Princess Mary in 1605 and appears to have been accepted as a member of the family, if somewhat nervously. From time to time Arbella was allowed to leave court. She went to Hardwick Hall when her grandmother died in February 1608 and visited the Talbots in Derbyshire when recovering from smallpox early in 1609.

There were suggestions that she had planned to stir up a revolution against James and that she had become Roman Catholic, and by the end of December 1609 she was under guard. In mid January things had settled down again and Arbella was asking for a match to be arranged or that she could be allowed to choose a husband. Early in 1610, at the age of 34, she secretly became engaged to William Seymour. He was much younger, aged just twenty-two, the younger brother of the Edward Seymour whom Arbella had hoped to marry in 1603 and grandson of the Earl of Hertford. James ordered them to drop marriage negotiations and following an apology from Arbella, James agreed she could marry anyone of whom he approved.

Incautiously Arbella and William married secretly at four in the morning of 22nd June and the secret was kept for two weeks but on the 8th and 9th July they were questioned and imprisoned. William was put in the Tower of London and Arbella was sent to the house of Sir Thomas Parry, chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in Lambeth. William and Arbella carried on a flourishing correspondence which James discovered and in January 1611 James told Arbella that William was to remain in the Tower for the rest of his life and that she was to be exiled to the far north of England under the care of the Bishop of Durham. She was forced to start the journey on the 15 March 1611. Although it has been suggested that it was intended that she should stop

for the first night at Barnet it seems that the journey was broken at Highgate. An order of that date signed by her uncle, Gilbert Earl of Shrewsbury, was issued by the Council at Whitehall to Alderman Sir William Bond, in whose Arundel House she stayed, which confirms this:

Forasmuch as there is some occason to make provision for one nygte Lodginge for the La Arbella, in respect that she cannot convenientlie reach Barnett, some things being wanting for hir journey this afternoone contrarie to hir expectacon; wee haue thought good to entreat you not to refuse for hir such a courtesie as the lending of a couple of chambers for hir La¹

A bill for the costs involved with Arbella's stay included a reference to the period spent at Highgate:

At Highgate for six days begonne the xvth daye of Marche 1610 [1611] and ended the xxjst of the same month, on which day her ladishipp removed to Barnett.²

She managed to turn an overnight stop at Highgate into one of six days but after Sir James Croft arrived she was forced to continue her journey. Contrary to some histories of Highgate it was not from Arundel House that she made her escape but from East Barnet. Arbella reached an unknown inn at Barnet on the 21st March. A letter from the Bishop of Durham to Salisbury from Barnet recorded their arrival. Post master Henry Hendry refused to despatch the letter and Croft had to send it with his own servant. A bill submitted for her stay at the Barnet inn showed the sum of 30 shillings to cover the cost 'for glasses broken and rewardes to the meaner servauntes'.³ From Barnet her doctor, Thomas Moundford, wrote to her uncle Gilbert Talbot that she was too ill to travel further and James I sent his own doctor, Dr. Hammond, to examine her. Hammond stayed in Barnet for three days and confirmed that she was too weak to travel. Arbella wrote to the Council:

I protest I am in so weak case as I verily thinck it would be the cause of my death to be removed any whither at this time, though it weare to a place of my liking. My late discomfortable journey (which I have not yet recovered,) had almost ended my dayes and I have never since gonne out of a few little and hott roomes, and am many waies unfitt to take the ayre.⁴

James agreed to extend the period of her stay and arrangements were made for her to stay at the house of 'Thomas Conyers esquier, at Estbarnett', for which he was paid 20 shillings a week for a period of 10 weeks⁵. She moved to East Barnet on the 1st April to the house of

Thomas Conyers. There has been some debate as which house this was, since Conyers owned more than one property locally. Frederick Cass believed it to be Church Hill House whilst Frank Marsham considered it to have been Monkenfrith, which was described as a *messuage or farm* at the time of Conyers' death in 1614.⁶ Church Hill House was described as 'newly built' when in October 1611 Thomas Conyers was granted a license to demise it. At which time it was in the occupation of a London haberdasher, Peter Palmer.⁷

Sir James Croft kept Salisbury informed of his charges state of health regularly. He had written to Salisbury from the inn at Barnet on 31 March and he wrote again on 2 April from East Barnet, confirming that Arbella had been moved from Barnet to Mr. Conyers house the day before.⁸ A Nicholas Pay was authorised to arrange for the payment of the cost of Arbella's journey and his account included '*the provision of dyett and other necessarye*' for Lady Arbella Seymour in Barnet for ten days from the 22nd of March to the 1st April 1611. It took a little while for the house to be prepared, which delayed her transfer. The account showed that she was moved from Barnet to East Barnet on 1 April 1611. It also included:

To William Lewen for his attendauce in the office of caterer of poultrye at iijs per diem for himselfe & his horse. To Richarde Mattheve for his attendance in the butterey and pantrye at iijs per diem for himselfe & his horse. To Thomas Mylles for his attendaunce in the larder and kitchen at iijs per diem for himselfe & his horse. lxvj.li. ijs.

To rydinge & posting-charges, viz. of Henry Mynors at severall tymes from Barnett to Whitehall & backe again for dyrecons in this service from the lordes of the privie Councell xxxvs.

*House rent paid to Thomas Conyers esquier, for the rent of his house in Estbarnett for the lady Arbella Seymour & her companie for xen weekes at xxs the week xli.*⁹

Once installed in East Barnet Croft wrote asking for instructions because Arbella was *unable to walk the length of her chamber* and wrote that he had never seen her other than lying on her bed. The King allowed a further extension to the period of her stay and then Croft and Moundford appeared before the Privy Council to plead for more time. At first James refused and Croft presented him with an appeal from

Arbella to the King. He agreed to a further stay of a month but that she would have to continue her journey on 11 June.

The letter of appeal has survived in several drafts and Arbella seems to have written and rewritten it several times. She wrote of the *manie heavie crosses upon me but yette none is so greevous to me as the losse of your Majesties favour*. She wrote that she would have *sodaynlie perished if your Majestie had not speedelie had compassion of me in graunting me this time of stay for my recoverie, to which if itt maie please your Majestie of your gracious goodnes to add 3 weekes more*. She promised to *undergoe the Journey after this time expired without anie resistans or refusall* but as events demonstrated she did not keep her word.¹⁰

Whilst at East Barnet, Arbella had the services of the local rector the Revd Matthias Milward, who received £5 for his services in reading prayers and preaching. To enable her to drive out in the neighbourhood horses and a carriage were hired from a Thomas Webster and the cost of stabling and the hire of a coach are recorded in Pay's account. It must have caused quite a stir in the sleepy village.

Meanwhile Arbella's aunt, Mary Lady Shewsbury, was working in the background to provide a means of escape to the Continent for both Arbella and William. On Monday 3rd June 1611 Arbella pretended to her chaplain's wife Mrs. Adams that she was meeting her husband before they were to be separated by her journey to Durham. She dressed as a man 'by drawing a great pair of French-fashioned hose over her petticoates, and putting on a man's doublet, a man-lyke perruque with long locks, over her hair, a black hat, black cloake, russet bootes, with red tops, and a rapier by her syde, walked forth, between three and four of the clock'. According to Cass on leaving Thomas Conyers' house she turned to the right, passed the church and *followed the quiet and picturesque lane which leads to Betstile*¹¹. She and her servant, William Markham, walked one and a half miles to a *sorry inn* where a horse was waiting for her. At the inn, in a state of near collapse, she was met by Hugh Crompton with horses and from there she rode to Blackwall, arriving there at about six in the evening. There

she was met by her waiting-woman Mrs. Bradshaw, a maid and Edward Kyrton, and Reeves but William Seymour had not yet arrived.

While she was making her way from East Barnet her husband had been making his escape from the Tower, having pretended that he had toothache. It was intended that he should join her at Blackwall but was delayed and she travelled on by boat without him to the port of Leigh, where a French ship was to take her to Calais. Kyrton and the maid were left behind to wait for him and it was intended that Seymour should catch her up in Leigh. Arbella and her group located the French barque that was waiting for them and she would have waited for Seymour but was persuaded to sail. Meanwhile, Seymour, disguised *with a perruque and beard of black hair, and in a tauny cloth suit, walked alone without suspition from his lodging, out of the great weste door of the Tower, following a cart that brought him billets. From thence he walked along by the Tower wharfe by the wardens of the south gate, and so to the iron gate, where his friend Edward Rodney was ready with oars to receive him.* By the time he got to Leigh Arbella's ship had set sail. Seymour managed to get passage on another vessel and followed her to France.

Edward Rodney had left a note for Francis Seymour which was to be handed to him at 8 a.m. on the Tuesday, by which time he expected William and Arbella to have made good their escape. However Francis rushed to William's lodgings and forced his way in to find that William had gone. Sir William Waad was woken and he hurried to Greenwich to break the news to the King. James ordered that the couple were to be found and Croft was arrested and sent to the Fleet prison, Mrs. Adams and Dr. Moundford were hauled off to the Gatehouse, Mary, the Countess of Shrewsbury was taken to the Tower.

Meanwhile the French ship carrying Arbella had reached Calais after being delayed by bad weather. Foolishly, Arbella delayed setting foot on French soil and waited for William to join her. There the *Adventure* captained by Monson caught up with her and after firing two shots across her ships bows he boarded the ship and took Arbella back to England. She was taken straight to the Tower where she was to spend the rest of her life. She lost all enthusiasm for life and on 25

September 1615 she died. Her body was taken at night to Westminster Abbey where she was hurriedly buried in the vault of Mary, Queen of Scots.

For William the outcome was somewhat better. He landed at Ostend and travelled on to Bruges where he learnt that Arbella had been captured. With Rodney he stayed in Europe, firstly in Holland and then in France until after Arbella's death by which time he was no longer a threat to James I to whom he wrote a penitent letter. He was allowed to return to England in February 1616, succeeded his father as Earl of Hertford in 1621. By this time he had married Frances Devereux, daughter of the Earl of Essex, and named his eldest daughter Arabella.

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Notes

¹7,003 of the Harleian MSS quoted in *The History of Highgate* p.231

²Fredk. Cass *The Parish of East Barnet* p.55

³Ibid. p. 52

⁴SPD, James, vol. 62, f. 122 quoted in Sara Jayne Steen ed. *Letters of Lady Arabella Stuart* (Oxford 1994) p. 259

⁵PRO E/351/2800 1793

⁶*Barnet Press* 27 November 1937

⁷Fredk. Cass *The Parish of East Barnet* p.45

⁸State Papers Dom Vol xii

⁹The account of Nicholas Pay quoted in Fredk. Cass *The Parish of East Barnet* p.56

¹⁰Letter Arbella Seymour to King James BL Harley MS 7003 f.79-81 quoted in Sara Jayne Steen ed. *Letters of Lady Arabella Stuart* (Oxford 1994) p. 262-6

¹¹Fredk. Cass *The Parish of East Barnet* p. 53 - (now Brunswick Park Road and near to the roundabout at the junction with Oakleigh Road etc.)

GENEALOGY OF ARABELLA STUART AND WILLIAM SEYMOUR

