

The Blanche Parry Embroidery

There in front of me, hanging in Hatfield House, was *The Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I*, painted c.1603, a beautiful portrait full of symbolism and colour, the Queen gazing steadily at the onlooker. I was absolutely enthralled, as I realised that, incredibly, the Queen's dress exactly matched the Blanche Parry Embroidery¹ in St. Faith's Church, Bacton, Herefordshire, which I knew well and had studied so carefully.

Sunday, 17th August 2003 was, for me, a beautiful day and I was thoroughly enjoying our visit to the house owned by the Marquess of Salisbury, a descendant of Blanche Parry's cousin and close friend Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley. Only one wing survives of the earlier Hatfield House, now known as the Old Palace, where Elizabeth was allowed to live, under house-arrest, during the dangerous days of the reign of her sister Queen Mary and it was here, at Hatfield, that Elizabeth learned of her accession to the throne when Mary died. For me the whole site was evocative as I knew that Blanche Parry had also lived here, devotedly attending her mistress.

The previous day I had visited, with my husband Terry, the *Elizabeth Exhibition*² at Greenwich and I had been able to examine the original painting of *Queen Elizabeth I's Presence Chamber*³ which clearly records Blanche Parry's position in the Elizabethan Royal Court. Now, at Hatfield, my 'mind's eye' wandered back into the 16th century to visualise Blanche and her beloved Elizabeth together in the Old Palace⁴ from where the view across to the Church is still markedly the same. Lord Burghley's son, Robert 1st Marquess of Salisbury, is entombed there. The portrait of Lord Burghley⁵ resplendent in his robes as Queen Elizabeth's Lord Treasurer, hangs on the walls of the later house built by this same Robert Cecil. I had researched Lord Burghley; I even knew his handwriting and I knew how he had helped his cousin Blanche. They were both members of the close circle around Queen Elizabeth that is shown in the painting of *Queen Elizabeth I's Presence Chamber*⁶ Then, turning from Lord Burghley, I had been confronted with the Queen's famous *Rainbow Portrait*⁷. I was utterly and completely stupefied. I could hardly believe what I was seeing.

1 Richardson, Ruth E., *Blanche Parry & Queen Elizabeth I*, 2012, picture for January with full text.

2 Held 1st May to 14th September 2003.

3 The usual title for this picture is *Queen Elizabeth receiving Dutch Ambassadors in the Presence Chamber*. Water-colour by an unknown artist, probably German, c.1570-75. (picture Gouache on paper, ©Staatliche Museen – Graphische Sammlung Kassel 10430) The two kneeling ambassadors are named as Vestlan and Walsbrun but the Dutch National Archives confirmed that these names are not Dutch. See Richardson, Ruth E., *Mistress Blanche Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante*, 2007, pages 78-82. Richardson, 2012, picture for October. For this and other pictures see also: http://www.blancheparry.co.uk/galleries/index.php?spgmGal=1_Blanche_Parry

4 Richardson, 2012, picture for November with full text.

5 Ibid, for March.

6 This important painting of Queen Elizabeth receiving two emissaries, from Hesse-Kassel in Germany, records the power structure at Queen Elizabeth's Court c.1569-1573.

Those standing are: Sir William Cecil Lord Burghley, Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, Edward Fiennes de Clinton Lord Admiral, Blanche Parry, Christopher Hatton, Queen Elizabeth I, and Francis Walsingham.

Some names - 'Lister', 'Admiral', 'Konigin' (Queen) and 'Ambassador' for Walsingham - were added later.

Blanche was mistakenly identified as Mary Queen of Scots ('Konigin von Scotland') who never met Elizabeth.

Blanche is here as Elizabeth's chaperone and she was at the centre of the Royal Court. She was in charge of the Privy Chamber controlling access to the Queen on her behalf, the Queen's jewels, and for a time the Great Seal of England. She received books, furs and money for the Queen. She acted as the Queen's personal assistant and was a conduit for passing information, even Parliamentary bills, to the Queen. See Richardson, 2007.

7 The *Rainbow Portrait* was attributed to Marcus Gheeraets the Younger who grew up in England. He certainly painted the queen around the 1590s (the *Ditchley Portrait* is c.1592) so, if he was the painter, the *The Rainbow Portrait* could be earlier than the 1600-1602 usually ascribed to it due to the Queen's visit to Hatfield in 1602. More recently it has been attributed to Isaac Oliver, or Olivier, a French Huguenot, and Marcus Gheeraets' brother-in-law, who lived in London 1568-1617. He was primarily a painter of miniatures.

The date of 1600-1602 usually ascribed to the *Rainbow Portrait* connects it with Queen Elizabeth's visit to Hatfield in 1602 but it could have been painted earlier. It is one of a series of allegorical pictures of the Queen which presented her as an icon. Sir Roy Strong⁸ dates such depictions as from 1579. Indeed, it is now clear that the earliest use of this 'Gloriana-portrait-design' was the Blanche Parry monument in Bacton Church which is now securely dated from documentation to before November 1578. In this monument the Queen is shown in the guise of St. Faith⁹.

The *Rainbow Portrait* depicts Elizabeth as the classical goddess Diana, or Cynthia, personifying the sun. She holds a rainbow in her right hand, which, by appearing after storms, was a symbol of peace. This could be an allusion to the 1588 Armada victory eighteen months before Blanche Parry's death in 1590. Elizabeth's jewels, which include rubies, diamonds and pearls, are magnificent. Her ageless face is meant to be iconic, not realistic, and although she was aged in her sixties, she wears her hair (a wig) loose as a girl, a virgin, would do at her wedding. The eyes and ears painted on her cloak and the serpent on her sleeve, refer to her foreknowledge and wisdom. It is a portrait designed to demonstrate the Queen's all-seeing, all-knowing, power to safeguard her subjects.

However, what astounded me was the Queen's bodice, perhaps a stomacher. It is probable that it matched her skirt which is unseen under her draped cloak. It is shown embroidered with flower motifs which I immediately saw are the same design as those on the Blanche Parry Embroidery in Bacton Church. This piece was professionally embroidered with similar flowers including sprigs of columbine and vine, daffodils, roses, honeysuckle, oak-leaves, acorns and mistletoe. Recognised as skilled embroidery, the cloth used is white silk and silver thread that is often known as tissue of silver. Many of the motifs were worked in gold. Due to the quality of the piece it had to have been made for royalty as the Sumptuary Laws prevented anyone else being able to wear something so costly. Even though the Queen treated Blanche as a Baroness, and she owned sables, Blanche could not wear such cloth.

What she could do was to augment such cloth. So perhaps Blanche herself sewed the earliest of the additional motifs in those hours when she was keeping the Queen company. Interspersed between the lovely flowers are motifs which include bears, birds, butterflies, caterpillars, dogs, dragonflies, fish, frogs, squirrels, stags, and tiny rowing boats with minuscule occupants some of whom are fishing. I have spent hours with a magnifying glass picking out the extraordinary details of these enchanting additions. The embroidery hung on the north wall of Bacton Church where the sun never reached it so preserving its colours. Subsequently, it has been found that the colours have been preserved even more vividly under the frame's cross struts and on the back of the cloth. When new it was magnificent.

Exactly how this beautiful embroidery arrived at Bacton Church is difficult to determine. Analysis of the cloth itself and investigating the source material that inspired some of the additional motifs can provide some answers. What is clear beyond doubt is that it was somehow connected with Blanche Parry for, although Bacton Church has been described as 'a perfect shrine of beauty', and 'a little restful church'¹⁰, it is a long way from the hub of historic events. The only reason this embroidery was given to Bacton Church was due to Blanche Parry and/or in memory of Blanche Parry. Perhaps Blanche loved the design so much that Queen Elizabeth herself made a gift of the cloth to Blanche's family church. Therefore, it is right to call it the Blanche Parry Embroidery.

8 Strong, Sir Roy, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, Thames and Hudson, 1987.

9 Richardson, 2007, pages 143-148. This is the first depiction of Queen Elizabeth as Gloriana, an icon.

10 Both quotations are preserved in Rev. Charles Brothers own volume of cuttings now in the possession of his great-nephew Colin Brothers. The second was written by Rev. A. Baring-Gould of St. Martin's, Haverfordwest in his parish magazine. He describes Bacton as 'a picture church with its great walled-in yew, also at the entrance to the churchyard, where the paths are lined with standard roses, all in full bloom'.

Blanche was buried with the ceremonial of a Baroness and her chief mourner at her funeral on 27th February 1590, who by custom was of the same status in society, was her great-niece, Frances (Vaughan) Lady Burgh (or Borough) of Gainsborough in Lincolnshire. In her Final Will, Blanche requested to be buried near her beloved nephew, John Vaughan, in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster.¹¹ Frances, described as 'the Queen's maid at Court' in 1579, was John Vaughan's daughter. Blanche had been a witness to Frances' and Thomas Burgh's marriage settlement Indenture of 1583, the other witnesses including Blanche's cousin Lord Burghley, the bridegroom, his parents and brother, Lord Burghley's elder son, and Thomas Burgh's maternal grandfather Sir Edward Fiennes de Clinton Earl of Lincoln. Clinton was the 'Admiral' shown in the picture of *Queen Elizabeth's Presence Chamber* [see note 6 above]. Another of Blanche's great-nieces, and John Vaughan's cousin's daughter, was Katherine Knollys, married to Robert, the fourth son of the Sir Francis Knollys¹² who held a succession of Court appointments including, in 1566, being the Treasurer of the Queen's Chamber. Katherine had served as Blanche's waiting gentlewoman.

Robert Knollys commented on the great sorrow at the time of Blanche's death shown by the Queen and the ladies of the Privy Chamber. Blanche was a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth's mother and had been with Elizabeth for fifty-six years. Indeed, Elizabeth had known Blanche all her life, since she was a baby. Blanche knew everyone of note at the Royal Court, they all knew her, and very many were related or connected to her¹³. It is clear that Blanche Parry was at the epicentre of the Elizabethan Royal Court and the confidante of Queen Elizabeth herself.

Blanche's Final Will of 1589 detailed numerous bequests including to the Queen, Lord Burghley, Francis Lady Burgh, Katherine Knollys and other friends at Court. She had appointed Lord Burghley as supervisor of her Will and her executors were her nephew Thomas Powell and Hugh Bethell who acted as Steward of her Yorkshire estates. It was Thomas Powell, described as 'of the City of London, gent.' who arranged for Blanche's tombstone in St. Margaret's Church Westminster. According to Welsh custom, as his father was Howell Watkyn he was ap (son of) Howell which he anglicised to Powell. On Blanche's epitaph he describes her as the daughter of Henry Parry, a name Blanche's father would not have recognised. Blanche's father was Henry Myles. It was his son, Blanche's brother, who first used Parry (from ap Harry, son of Harry / Henry) as a surname in the English fashion. The spelling variations of Blanch(e)'s own name include Parry, a Pary, or Apparry. Presumably Thomas thought it judicious to accord Blanche's father her English surname. His links with the Welsh border would seem to have weakened. So, although Thomas, and Hugh Bethell, with Lord Burghley's help, were meticulous in carrying out Blanche's final wishes and bequests it is unlikely that any of them would have thought about donating a piece of cloth to Bacton Church. Nevertheless, the embroidery reached Bacton somehow and the most likely conduits would seem to be Frances (Vaughan) Lady Burgh and Katherine Knollys.

They both knew of Blanche's regard for Bacton for the old manor house of Newcourt was Blanche's childhood home and the Church served as her family's mausoleum. Blanche had arranged before November 1578 for a tomb to be sculpted in case she retired to Bacton. After all, her aunt, Lady Troy, had retired to live with her son, but, in the event, Blanche never left Queen Elizabeth and died at Court. Katherine Knollys and her sister, Elizabeth

11 Despite later assertions that her bowels, then changed to her heart, were buried at Bacton Church Blanche's body was buried intact in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster. Bacton Church has her monument not her tomb.

12 Sir Francis Knollys / Knowles was Lord Hunsdon's nephew. Lord Hunsdon was himself the Queen's nephew and was married to the grand-daughter of Lady Troy, Blanche Parry's aunt. Lady Troy was the Lady Mistress who brought up Elizabeth and Edward VI, the children of Henry VIII.

13 Richardson 2007 for full details and references.

Vaughan¹⁴, inherited the Parry estates in 1583, and Elizabeth and her husband, Rowland Vaughan, moved into Newcourt. Although his wife died c.1588, Rowland Vaughan continued to live there until c.1610 and retained possession. Blanche had already sent two pictures, one of herself and one of the Queen¹⁵, and chairs to Newcourt presumably in preparation for her projected retirement. Therefore, it is reasonable that any further possessions would also be sent to Newcourt. I would tentatively suggest that the Blanche Parry Embroidery was conveyed to Newcourt and then to Bacton Church under the auspices of Katherine Knollys. She probably acted in conjunction with Frances Lady Burgh, who was perhaps the embroiderer of the later additional motifs¹⁶. It is likely that only a lady of her status would have felt comfortable working extra motifs, all of which are individual not grouped, onto such a valuable fabric. Frances was Blanche's chief mourner and she was one 'of our Maydens of honour' in 1578 when the Queen's tailor, Walter Fyshe, made her a new gown¹⁷.

The embroidery arrived in Bacton Church to be used as a covering for an altar. None of the beautiful motifs is ecclesiastical in design¹⁸, which clearly shows that it was a cloth special to Blanche and was chosen only to commemorate her. Taken from sections of a dress its dimensions are a central panel, measuring length 105 cms. (c. 41 inches) by width 53 cms (c. 21 inches) that would have lain on the flat top of the altar. The back 'flap' is length 105 cms by depth 11 cms (c. 4 inches). The front panel is length 105 cms by depth 52 cms (c. 20 inches). Each of the side panels is 53 cms by depth 52 cms¹⁹. The depth is exactly the same on the three sides that would be visible to the congregation. This depth does not allow the altar to stand on the ground where it would be far too low for ease of use unless the table legs were long. So the conclusion from these dimensions is that the embroidery was cut to cover a free-standing altar that stood on a table and was against a wall or, more probably, a reredos.

The embroidery joined Blanche's Parry's monument in Bacton Church and the vicar (probably Revd. Nicholas Corne)²⁰ and parishioners were evidently proud to own it and use it for it was carefully looked after. When not in use it must have been kept in the dark, probably in a box, or the colours would have faded far more. Also in Bacton Church's possession was a rare pre-Reformation chalice and paten that may have been donated by Blanche in her lifetime or obtained through the auspices of her brother²¹. The parishioners had kept these safe even in the reign of Queen Elizabeth when all communicants received the consecrated wine and a larger cup was used. Safety was not a real issue until the years of the Commonwealth. Then the communion table, not now recognised as an altar, was only allowed to be covered by a decent white cloth. Around the same time, as often happened, the Revd. Nicholas Corne, may have been deprived of his living for royalist sympathies. However, by 1665 the Revd. William Peyton had been appointed to Bacton and the pre-Reformation chalice was specifically noted as being in Bacton Church.

14 Richardson 2007, especially pages 149-150, Richardson, Ruth E. in The Golden Valley Study Group, *The Man who Drowned the Meadows, Rowland Vaughan, 1558-1627*, Logaston Press, 2016, pages 18-20.

15 For this new picture of Queen Elizabeth see <http://www.blancheparry.co.uk/elizabeth.shtml>

16 Frances was buried near her father and Blanche on 19th July 1647 in St, Margaret's Church, Westminster.

17 Arnold, Janet, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*, Maney, 1993, reprinted 1996, 1999, 2001, 2008, and 2014, page 100. This is an invaluable account of the Queen's wardrobe and Blanche is mentioned several times.

18 The Blanche Parry Embroidery is being studied and conserved at Hampton Court by Eleri Lynn, her team and the Historic Royal Palaces Conservation Department. It will focus in an Exhibition in due course.

19 Measurements taken by Jackie Barns-Graham when the cloth was removed from Bacton Church.

20 Revd. Nicholas Corne (or Cowper) was vicar 21st March 1605 to 1639 or later. In 1610 Rowland Vaughan claimed the Church was ruinous so if true, it is possible the embroidery was given into the personal care of Revd. Corne.

21 Made of silver-gilt, dated c.1490 to 1500, used by the priest for Mass. Medieval parishioners received the consecrated bread at Mass and usually only at Easter. The priest would elevate the chalice for the people to see and then he alone would sip the consecrated wine. As a result chalices were small. Bacton's has JOHN and CAPUTT (or CAPULL) inscribed on the engraved hexagonal foot below a knop with leopards', or lions', heads. The paten has the engraved face of Christ in the centre. Both are unmarked. Lent to Hereford Cathedral. Further details in the Guide Notes to Bacton Church by Ruth E. Richardson.

Nothing is yet known about the embroidery, chalice or paten in the succeeding two hundred years except that it can be inferred that they were cared for even when the Church building itself was in a poor condition. Then in the 19th century references to all three treasures unexpectedly appear. In 1861 the annual Church Congress of the Church of England (Anglican Church)²² was inaugurated to provide an opportunity for clerical, lay members and representatives to discuss the religious, moral and social matters pertaining to the Church. It was held in a different ecclesiastical diocese each year. In 1879 the perceived success of these Church Congresses led to the establishment of an additional, accompanying, attraction of a Church Congress Ecclesiastical and Educational Art Exhibition.

The Bacton incumbents in these years were the Revd. Charles Proberts (or Roberts) 1835-1884, Revd. William Harrison 1884-1891, Revd. John Grosvenor Monro M.A. 1891-1904 and Revd. Charles Thomas Brothers²³ (1863-1953), incumbent 1904 to 1952. Revd. Brothers was a man content with his job and position in life for he refused all offers of preferment (promotion) from several of the six Bishops of Hereford during his tenure. He loved Bacton parish, donating three stained-glass windows to the Church: that depicting Saint Faith in 1905, and Saint Lawrence and Saint Stephen in 1921. He was also chaplain to the Dore Union Workhouse. His sister Edith kept house for him, and it was locally, but kindly, said that she ran the parish for him. When he died, after a tenure of 49 years, the parishioners placed the tablet to his memory in Bacton Church. He was the last incumbent of the single parish, living in the adjacent rectory, before it was joined with Abbeydore.

Little is known about the first two of this group but Revd. Munro was actively involved in restoring Bacton Church and unsuccessfully tried to have the Parry windows, removed to Atcham Church near Shrewsbury in 1811, returned. It is probable that it was Revd. Munro who took the embroidery, the chalice and the paten to be displayed in several of these Ecclesiastical Art Exhibitions for his successor, Revd. Brothers noted that the embroidery *often used to go away to the Congress Exhibitions*. All three treasures were considered to be in the legal ownership of the rector and diocesan permission was obviously not required. It is incredible to think that these priceless treasures were simply packed into a bag and taken as ordinary luggage to various venues around the country.

It may be that Revd. Monro had already organised the next loan for in 1904 Revd. Brothers showed an immediate interest in the embroidery, chalice and paten, taking them all to be displayed at the very next Ecclesiastical Art Exhibition which, in 1904, was held in the Diocese of Liverpool. Each Congress delegate could also obtain an *Illustrated Guide to the Church Congress Ecclesiastical Art Exhibition*. His description in this loan catalogue is the

22 The first Congress was held due to the 1852 revival of convocation. Congresses did not legislate or vote on issues. A list of venues 1861 to 1930 is given on https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Congress Several of these venues have a copy of the 'Exhibition Guide in their local archives. Hereford was never a host diocese.

23 Charles Brothers, born in Chipping Sodbury, Gloucestershire, attended St. Bees Theological College, Cumberland and was ordained in Newcastle Cathedral. His father was a supervisor of Inland Revenue in Newcastle. He served as a curate in St. John's Church, Percy Main, Tynemouth (now North Shields) where he was described as winning 'the love and esteem of the entire parish by his kindness of heart, amiability of temper and his devotion to duty...an all round, capable and good man.' He moved to Milford Haven and then, from 1902-1904, to Stretton Grandison in Herefordshire before being appointed to Bacton. An historian, he was also interested in music. One of his letters quotes Shakespeare, Milton and George Herbert to support his views on 'the charms of sweet music'. A fellow priest recorded that 'he loves his church and flock too well to leave them, and so he remains - loved by all.' He rang the Church bell every day 'for the Daily Office with such regularity that the parishioners set their clocks and watches by it for they know their Rector is never a moment out in his daily ministration in the Church.' However, 'the sympathy of numbers is lacking. The Rector plays the organ, reads the Service and preaches. In winter time, he lights the boiler which heats the Church, trims and lights the lamps, for there is no one else to do it....In this little Church on the hill the Easter Communion number more than half of the parish including the children. Truly a wonderful record.' Charles Brothers noted the number of communicants in the relevant parish magazine saying that although seventy-six attended, those who did not knew who they were and he hoped their consciences would bring them next time!

first documented reference so far found to the embroidery:

*318A. Embroidered Altar Cloth, white silk shot with gold, from the Church of St. Faith, Bacton, Herefordshire. Presented by Mistress Blanche Parry, maid of honour to Queen Elizabeth. The needlework of the foliage and fruit is of the most exquisite description, but apparently the birds, beasts, fishes, insects, reptiles, and human figures were added by a later and less skilled hand. Unfortunately, the altar cloth was cut down to suit a very small altar some time previous to the present century, and, later still, 'repaired' in a very bungling fashion. There are two traditions extant: one that the altar cloth was formed out of an existing cope, which is certainly false; the other that it was made from one of Blanche Parry's court dresses, which is probably not the case.*²⁴

The next reference to the embroidery is found in one of the Parish magazines²⁵. This is No. 57, September 1910:

For a long while now we have intended saying something about the Blanche Parry Altar Cloth. Towards the end of last year this magnificent and interesting piece of work was framed and hung on the north wall of the Church, so that every one could see it. Before that time, we doubt if many of our own people had ever seen it, though it used often to go away to the Congress exhibitions. The Altar Cloth, then, was undoubtedly given to the Church by Dame Blanche Parry, the most distinguished parishioner Bacton ever possessed. There are some interesting notes on this lady, sent us by Mrs. Studdy, of Stratford-on-Avon, in the Magazine for August, 1907. There it is stated that Dame Blanche died at the royal Court in 1589, aged 81. From this it may be seen that the Altar Cloth is considerably over 300 years old. It is of white corded silk, shot with silver, and powdered over with bunches of flowers, very beautifully embroidered in silk. The colours are wonderfully preserved, and amongst the posies may be seen daffodils, roses, honeysuckle, oak-leaves and acorns, mistletoe, etc., etc. Scattered between the flowers is a strange assemblage of animals, sea monsters, men in boats, creeping things, birds and butterflies. There is nothing at all ecclesiastical about the Altar Cloth, and this bears out the tradition that it formed part of one of Blanche Parry's Court dresses or trains. At the White City Exhibition was shown a picture of Queen Elizabeth, lent by the Duke of Portland, in which the Queen was represented wearing an underskirt of identical design. It is possible that our Altar Cloth was once worn by Queen Elizabeth. At any rate, it is a great treasure, of which we may be justly proud. In later times, shameful to say, this beautiful piece of work was remorselessly cut up to fit a very small Communion Table, which accounts for its present shape.

		£	s.	d.
Framing the Altar Cloth cost	3	8	1	
which was made up as follows:—				
The late General Bishop	1	0	0	
Mrs. Studdy, Stratford-on-Avon	0	10	0	
From Church Funds	1	18	1	
	£3	8	1	

24 There are also descriptions of the chalice and paten. Revd. Brothers took the chalice and paten to the 1924 Oxford 'Exhibition. He could not take the Blanche Parry Embroidery in 1924 as it was framed. I am indebted to Roger Hull of the Liverpool Record office.

25 These volumes were dispersed and sold at Revd. Brothers' death. Colin Brothers, his great-nephew has 1912. Others, including the 1910 volume, now belong to Mr. and Mrs. Bill Millington. Mr. Millington is currently the Churchwarden of Bacton Church. I am most grateful to them for allowing me access to these volumes.

Indeed Revd. Brothers' time at Bacton was chronicled in the monthly Bacton Church Parish magazine, an invaluable record of parish life. He also liked to travel and he included interesting accounts of his various visits for the parishioners. Among these are a visit to the Holy Land and a particularly interesting visit to Flanders and the battle-scarred areas of the Western Front immediately after the First World War. The magazines that survive are an invaluable record of his time in the parish for he kept them all and had each year bound in a red volume. Here, in September 1910, he described the framing of the Blanche Parry Embroidery in the autumn of 1909 *so that everyone could see it*. The craftsmanship of the oak frame was excellent for it survived 106 years hung on the north wall of the Church until the embroidery was removed for conservation to Hampton Court Palace on 17th December 2015. It had cost £3-8s-1d (equivalent to about £194-24p now). Mrs Studdy, who had sent notes about Blanche herself for the August 1907 magazine, also contributed.

However, Mrs Studdy was wrong about the date of Blanche's death and wrong about her age. She died, in our terms, on Thursday, 12th February 1590, aged 82 years. To Blanche herself the date would have been 1589 because at that time the year date changed on 25th March, Lady Day, and remained that way until 1752. So, as Blanche died in February to her and her contemporaries this was 1589, while to us it was 1590.

Though the chalice and paten were described as being in regular use this was not true of the embroidery. Revd. Brothers noted that before 1909 *we doubt if many of our own people had ever seen it, though it used often to go away to the Congress exhibitions*. So, one or more of the previous three incumbents of Bacton Church had also taken these church treasures to the Ecclesiastical Art Exhibitions. Presumably, they must have been kept safely by the vicar or rector, who had legal charge of church moveables, in a cupboard or perhaps under his bed! What is clear is that wherever, and however, they were all stored the embroidery itself was for most of the time in the dark, probably in a wooden box for there was no damaging lengthy exposure to the light.

In 1904 Revd. Brothers had mentioned the tradition that the embroidery originally came from *one of Blanche Parry's court dresses*. By 1910 his doubts about this attribution had led him to suggest that *It is possible that our Altar Cloth was once worn by Queen Elizabeth*. His reasoning was that *At the White City Exhibition was shown a picture of Queen Elizabeth, lent by the Duke of Portland, in which the Queen was represented wearing an underskirt of identical design*. The 1908 Franco-British Exhibition at the White City (then Shepherd's Bush) was held in 1910 to celebrate the Entente Cordiale signed by England (UK) and France in 1904. It attracted eight million visitors. However, the two extant publications relating to it: *The Franco-British Exhibition Illustrated Review* (1908) and the *Souvenir of the Fine Art Section at the Franco-British Exhibition* (1908), have no mention of either a portrait of Queen Elizabeth I or of a loan from the Duke of Portland²⁶.

The Duke of Portland did own a full-length portrait of Queen Elizabeth I which is variously entitled the Welbeck, Wanstead, Peace or Pax Portrait²⁷, attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder, c. 1585-90. It is dated c.1580 to 1585, that is before Blanche Parry died in 1589/90. The motifs embroidered on the Queen's lovely dress include roses, pimpernels, borage, flax and pansies, which are different from those on the Blanche Parry Embroidery.

26 I am grateful for this information from Robin Francis, Head of Archive & Library, National Portrait Gallery. These two publications are in the Library. He also checked the published catalogues of the Portland Paintings Collection at Welbeck Abbey (1896 and 1936)...The catalogue entries list exhibitions in which the portrait was shown but the 1936 volume does not mention the Franco-British Exhibition in 1908. In the separate catalogue of Welbeck Abbey miniatures published in 1916, a portrait of Queen Elizabeth I in robes of state, attributed to Nicholas Hilliard is listed, but again there is no mention of this having been exhibited in 1908. Letter to author.

27 There is a full description in Arnold 2014, pages 137-138.

Another picture with a similar design on the underskirt is the portrait of Elizabeth Vernon Countess of Southampton which dates from c.1590. The cloth depicted was presumably worked by seamstresses to a standard pattern. In addition, closer investigation shows that the motifs on these two portraits are further apart, and I have measured the distances, than the motifs on the Blanche Parry Embroidery. Interestingly, the *Welbeck Portrait* was painted by the elder Marcus Gheeraerts, while the *Rainbow Portrait* was painted by his son or son-in-law. Cloth with a floral design was evidently fashionable in the later 1580s-1590 and the Queen may have had a number of dresses with such pretty patterning. Clearly it was a design much liked by Blanche Parry as the embroidery sent to Bacton Church belonged to her and/or reminded her friends of her. Her beloved Queen Elizabeth would have known Blanche's preferences and she may have actually given the cloth to Bacton Church herself.

It is thanks to the incumbents of Bacton Parish, and in particular to Revd. Charles Brothers, that the Blanche Parry Embroidery has survived²⁸. It is also to the great credit of the parishioners and visitors since 1909 that it was able to do so without any security. It was there through two devastating World Wars and the enormous changes that affected the people and the area. It was due to these safety issues, which is a sad comment on the present, that I was careful how I publicised this discovery in my biography of Blanche Parry, *'Mistress Blanche, Queen Elizabeth I's Confidante'* 2007 and in the book / calendar *'Blanche Parry & Queen Elizabeth I'* 2012. I knew the Blanche Parry Embroidery was valuable, though at the time few believed me, and that there could be no security for such a priceless treasure in Bacton Church.

The exciting research now being undertaken will provide more information. Bacton Church still owns the Blanche Parry Embroidery which is a national treasure being the only surviving cloth from one of Queen Elizabeth I's dresses. It will be on show to the public when it has been conserved. Bacton Church now has a stunningly beautiful replica which hangs on the north wall, in a special case, where the original used to hang for so long. Although a photograph on canvas, the high resolution and special equipment used makes it look like textile. The details and colours are marvellous and it is well worth seeing. We can also see what the cloth originally looked like in the *Rainbow Portrait*. So, for this unique survival we are fortunate in being able to see the cloth itself, a picture of what it once looked like and, finally, a beautifully produced replica. Wonderful!

Meanwhile, pictures and research documents mentioned here can be found in the Gallery on www.blancheparry.com

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28 Revd. Brothers' interest in the Blanche Parry Embroidery continued. In the December 1912 Parish Magazine He wrote: 'We are pleased to say that Mrs. Chapman, the wife of Dr. Chapman of Hereford, has very kindly promised to come and give us a Lecture, with lantern pictures, on *Mistress Blanche Parry*, our most illustrious benefactress and parishioner. This will likely be in January.' Blanche's alms bequest to Bacton Church still continues (see Richardson 2007). I am indebted to Colin Brothers for the references.

Revd. Brothers also kept a cutting entitled *Queen Elizabeth's Kirtle* by Lionel Cust. Sir Lionel Henry Cust was Director of the National Portrait Gallery 1895-1909 and co-editor of *The Burlington Magazine* 1909-1919. The cutting was from one of these magazines [see Gallery]. He noted: *Specially noteworthy are the embroidered dresses in the portraits of Queen Elizabeth...such as the small full-length portrait at Welbeck Abbey, the great full-length portrait at Hardwick Hall, the so-called 'Rainbow' portrait at Hatfield and the beautiful portrait at Cobham Hall. What became of these wonderful dresses?... it is quite reasonable to suggest that the embroidery given by Mistress Parry to Bacton Church is a piece of an actual kirtle worn by Queen Elizabeth...* Sir Henry also included photographs of the embroidery before it was framed in 1909. However, Sir Henry Cust did not realise the dress in the *Rainbow Portrait* is the same cloth as the Blanche Parry Embroidery.