



117 *Portrait of an Unknown Lady*

[Queen Mary I; Perhaps Margaret Douglas]

c. 1557

Oil on Four Oak Boards

70 ¼ x 37 ½ in. (178.4 by 95 cm)

Collection of Canon Timothy Russ, Cambridge UK

Provenance: A picture was recorded by George Vertue in 1733 when at Sutton Place, Surrey, as 'a Lady at len. in black. manner Holbein'; likely by descent at Sutton Place, Surrey until Denys Lawlor Huddleston of Sawston Hall, Cambridge who probably acquired the painting from the then owner, Philip Witham, c. 1919; by descent to William Herbert Huddleston (d. 1929), of Sawston Hall, Cambridge; by descent to Reginald Eyre Huddleston of Sawston Hall, Cambridge; by descent to Canon Timothy Russ, Cambridge.

Exhibitions: London, Royal Academy, *British Portraits*, 1956-57, no. 10 (as a *Portrait of Queen Mary*); London, Tate Gallery, *The Elizabethan Image*, 1969-70, no. 26; London, Tate Gallery, *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, 12th October 1995 - 7th January 1996, no. 15.

Selected Literature: F. Harrison, (1893), *Annals of an Old Manor House: Sutton Place, Guildford*, London, 161; L. Willoughby, (1910), "Sutton Place, Guildford: A Surrey Manor House Part II", *The Connoisseur*, vol. 26 (101), London, January, 3-16; G. Vertue, (1936), "Note Books, Vol. IV," *Walpole Society Journal*, Oxford, 26, 53; A. Oswald, (1954), 'Sawston Hall, Cambridge,' *Country Life*, London, 24 June, 1998-99; R. Strong, (1969), *The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraits*, London, no. 9; A. Carter, (1982), 'Mary Tudor's Wardrobe of Robes,' unpublished MA Thesis, Courtauld Institute, London, 45-6; K. Hearn, eds., (1995), *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, London, 53, no.15; L. Porter, (2007), *Mary Tudor: The First Queen*, London, frontispiece; S. Tait, (2009), "Could this mysterious woman in black be Mary Tudor?" *The Times*, 13 August; H. Walker, (2010), "On the Portrait of an Unknown Lady in Black in the Collection of Canon Timothy Russ," *Hans Eworth.com*, April; J. Guy, (2010), *Historical Report on a Panel Painting: A full length portrait of a Lady in Black*, Unpublished Report for Sothebys Auction House, May, 1-30.

Inscriptions: None.

Technical Data: A dendrochronological report by Ian Tyers of Dendrochronological Consultancy Limited (Report 312), dated October 2009 and commissioned by Sotheby's of London, indicates that the earliest date of use for the panels is 1534 and the latest is c. 1566. A condition report by Simon Bobak of Conservation of Paintings (London), dated 22 October 2009 and also commissioned by Sotheby's of London, indicates that the picture has "extensive past losses from flaking, several campaigns of repaint with thick layers of varnish" and "extensive paint blistering." Bobak goes on to note that the picture has several fractures in the panels, particularly in the area of the middle right board.

Attribution: In 1733 George Vertue visited Sutton Place, Surrey and there identified a portrait of "a lady in black at (length) manner Holbein" that was probably this portrait.¹ By 1893 the picture—still at Sutton Place—was attributed to "Moro." In 1969 Roy Strong attributed the picture to William Scrots, primarily based upon his opinion that the picture shares stylistic similarities with a full-length portrait by Scrots of Edward VI in the Royal Collection. More recently it has also been suggested that the picture may be by Eworth or of his workshop, although this picture lacks Eworth's 'HE' monogram and is entirely lacking in the kind of attention to detail and highlighting typically found in his works.²

However, given the present condition of the Russ picture it is difficult to firmly establish an artist attribution. Even so, the picture does indeed share some similarities with the Royal Collection's *Portrait of Edward VI*, particularly in the similar setting (both include chipped stonework and tiled floors) and in terms of scale, as both pictures are full-length.³ It is possible that the Russ picture was created by the same artist or workshop, although further technical research would be needed to further explore these issues.

¹ I am grateful to Emmeline Hallmark (Sotheby's, London) for suggesting this reference.

² When Canon Russ decided to try to sell the portrait at auction in 2009, Sotheby's (London) approached me, asking if I thought that the picture was a Eworth portrait (personal communication, 5 March 2010). According to Annette Mostyn, Canon Russ' personal assistant, he "has always been convinced it is by Hans Holbein." (Personal Communication, 27 March 2010).

³ John Guy has suggested that "some distinct features of the Privy Chamber at the palace of Whitehall seem to be echoed." See John Guy, *Historical Report*, 3. Henry VIII's Psalter (British Library, Royal 2 A xvi) includes images of King Henry sitting in a room with similar architectural details (f. 63v) and ruins (f. 79r).

Description: The woman in this portrait stands on a floor of diamond-shaped reddish-brown tiles. To her left, and just behind, is the corner of a stone wall that extends into the background behind her. Immediately behind her is a prominent fluted column resting on an acanthus leaf base that is itself sitting upon a rectangular plinth.⁴ On the right side of the plinth base two stone oval (probably decorative) elements are just visible, but their exact design or purpose is unclear. Behind the column and plinth, and receding into the background, is the corner of another wall that disappears from the right side of the picture. Exactly opposite this wall a stone archway extends away from the viewer, hinting at an exterior space. Just beyond the stone archway is a crumbling red brick wall with just a hint of open sky. The brick wall appears to be crumbling at the top and, just below that on the wall, is a square-shaped hole that suggests an old window.

Her dress consists of a French gown of black satin over a forepart and sleeves of black velvet. The velvet guards of her gown have a subtle, black on black, embroidered floral and vine pattern. Her turned back sleeves also appear to be lined with this same black velvet, albeit without any design motif. The band of her French hood is lined with black satin, with the folds of her (cloth of gold?) crespine just visible under her hood.⁵ The gown also has a white standing collar richly embroidered with gillyflowers in blackwork. The collar of her partlet and her chemise are likewise decorated with the same gillyflower motif, also embroidered in blackwork on a white (perhaps silk) base. At the bottom of the picture, her black shoes just peep out from underneath the bottom edge of her forepart.

On her person she wears remarkably few jewels and most of those that are present are modest. In her hands she holds a black ribbon, which falls from her left index finger down her gown. At the end of the ribbon is a round pendant or,

⁴ For more on the possible meaning of columns in the art of the Renaissance, see John Onians (1988), *Bearers of Meaning*, 263-309. For more on Netherlandish artists interest in the antique, see Arthur J. DiFuria, *Heemskerck's Rome: Antiquity, Memory, and the Berlin Sketchbooks*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Delaware, 2008, 135-142.

⁵ She is also wearing what Sarah Lorraine describes as a "shadow piece" that falls forward, from the back of the hood, further framing the face. The black stitching of the crespine may be where it was attached to the cap of her hood. For more on such pieces see Sarah Lorraine, *Reconstructing the French Hood*, July 2009, Accessed online at ModernHistorique.com, February 2010, 4-5 and 18-ff.



Edward VI
Workshop of William Scrots
c. 1550
Oil on panel
65 ¾ x 35 ¾ in. (167 x 90.8 cm)
Royal Collection [RCIN 405751]

perhaps, a watch.⁶ Her décolletage is decorated with a single small gold pendant decorated with a flower motif. And attached to the back of her French hood is a gold billiment made up of a series of gold beads; each bead contains several small embedded diamonds.

Discussion: In August, 2009 *The Times of London* published an article describing this portrait and questioning the accepted attribution of the sitter.⁷ The picture initially appeared in the news because Canon Russ has indicated his intention to sell the picture in order to raise funds for the purchase and restoration of Sawston Hall, which he hoped to transform into a Catholic heritage center.⁸

Aside from the *Times* article, the picture has drawn the recent attentions of Tudor historians and art historians, primarily because of Canon Russ' stated desire to sell the picture and the many unanswered questions surrounding the picture's provenance, attribution, and sitter.⁹ Canon Russ has argued, for example, that the picture is a portrait of Queen Mary I and in that he has had some support.¹⁰ Still there is nothing within the picture, which is unsigned, undated and essentially devoid of clues, to conclusively prove Russ' view.¹¹ Further, there are several scholars who disagree with him, particularly in terms of the sitter's identity.¹²

Yet there has been a dearth of modern scholarship on the Russ portrait that has problematized any greater understanding of the picture. There is, however, one notable exception: Karen Hearn's 1995 exhibition catalogue, *Dynasties; Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England*.¹³ There, within the Russ picture's catalogue entry, Hearn does briefly address the question of provenance,

⁶ Karen Hearn has suggested that, rather than a pendant, this object may be a watch. For more see *Dynasties; Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530-1630*, London: Tate Publishing, 1995, 53 (#15).

⁷ Simon Tait, "Could this mysterious woman in black be Mary Tudor?," *The Times of London*, 13 August, 2009, accessed online via *The Times Online* on 17 February, 2010.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ The picture was offered at auction on 7 July, 2010 at Sotheby's London sales rooms for an estimated £200,000-300,000 where it failed to sell.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Among his supporters are Dr Jack Scarisbrick and writer Linda Porter.

¹¹ In fact, the sitter bears no likeness to the portraits of Mary I by Master John, Hans Eworth and/or Anthonis Mor.

¹² *Ibid.* Among them are Dr. Tarnya Cooper and Sir Roy Strong.

¹³ Karen Hearn, eds. *Dynasties*, 1995, 53 (#15).

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suggesting that the claims of Huddleston ownership should be further investigated.¹⁴ Unfortunately it seems that since 1995 nothing else has been done to learn more about the picture's history. And although Canon Russ has recently developed his own website in order to more widely share his own views about the picture with the public, there he likewise seems to avoid a discussion of provenance.¹⁵

Until recently the assumption of most scholars appears to have been that the picture has always resided at Sawston Hall and therefore has always been in the Huddleston family collection.¹⁶ The Huddleston family was linked with the Tudors since at least 1553, when Edward VI died. That same year Mary I was provided shelter by Sir John Huddleston at Sawston Hall during her efforts to evade capture at the hands of the Duke of Northumberland.¹⁷ No doubt this connection has furthered the argument, made by Canon Russ and others, that the picture is a portrait of Queen Mary I. Yet, instead of always being in the Huddleston collection, my research demonstrates that the portrait was added to the Huddleston collection sometime after 1914, prior to which it was in the Weston Collection at Sutton Place, Surrey.¹⁸

The first concrete evidence to support this claim comes from a postcard printed by Francis Frith in 1914. There the Russ portrait is clearly shown hanging in the

Great Hall at Sutton Place. Working backward from 1914, in January 1910 *The Connoisseur* published an article concerning Sutton Place that includes a clear and unambiguous photograph of the painting¹⁹, again hanging in the Great Hall; the article also included the suggestion of an artist.²⁰ Continuing backward, in 1905 Robert Dell published an article on Sutton Place in *Burlington Magazine*.²¹ Although the portrait is not mentioned in the text, there are two photographs of the Great Hall that clearly include the Russ portrait.²² In 1893 Frederic Harrison published his *Annals of an Old Manor House: Sutton Place*, which includes the following reference to the picture: "Queen Mary (on panel)- Full length, about 70 by 45 inches; standing in black robe, holding a miniature in frame, apparently after Antonio More."²³ And, finally, in 1733 George Vertue visited Sutton Place and there identified a portrait of "a lady in black at (length) manner Holbein" that was probably this portrait.²⁴

During the time when this picture was created (c. 1545-50) Sutton Place was owned by Nicholas Statham and, soon afterward, was inherited by Sir Walter Denys, whose brother-in-law Sir Francis Weston was executed for his adulterous affair with Anne Boleyn in 1536.²⁵ Unfortunately the only Tudor-era inventory related to the house (that dates to 1542) provides no hint of the Russ portrait.²⁶ As a result we may never know if the picture originated with the

¹⁹ Leonard Willouby, "Sutton Place, Guilford: A Surrey Manor House-Part II," *The Connoisseur* 26(101), January 1910, 3-16.

²⁰ Ibid, 5.

²¹ Robert Dell, "A Tudor Manor House: Sutton Place," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 7(28), July 1905, 289-301.

²² Dell, "A Tudor," 295-296.

²³ Frederic Harrison, *Annals of an Old Manor House: Sutton Place, Guildford*, London: MacMillan, 1893, Chapter 6 (188-198). Harrison indicates that Mr. Sidney Harrison was the lessee of the estate during this period and that Harrison brought with him many of the object d'art and tapestries found within the house (189). However, he specifically indicates that the pictures belonged to the owner of the house rather than the current tenant (195).

²⁴ G. Vertue, "Note Books, Vol. IV," *Walpole Society Journal*, Oxford 1936, vol. 26, 53.

²⁵ W.H. Ireland, *A New and Complete History of the County of Kent, Vol. 4*, London, 1830, p. 372. For more on Sir Walter Denys see S.T. Bindoff, *The House*, 36-37. According to Bindoff, Denys' relationships at Court were "unaffected" by Weston's execution.

²⁶ For the 1542 inventory of Sutton Place see J.O. Halliwell-Phillipps, eds., *Ancient inventories of Furniture, pictures, tapestry, plate etc.*, London, 1854, Appendix and Harrison, *Annals of*, 1893, 206-12. The inventory specifically mentions 'hangyngs' of varying (primarily religious) motifs although these seem related to bed hangings rather than decorative wall hangings of which there are none listed. For more on Tudor and Stuart household inventories see Maurice Howard, "Inventories, Surveys and the History of Great Houses

¹⁴ Ibid. Hearn notes that "The supposition that it had 'always' been with the Huddleston family of Sawston Hall remains to be proved, as does a recent family alternative suggestion that it may have been purchased at the start of the present century."

¹⁵ Canon Timothy Russ, 'Mary Tudor Painting - Sawston,' accessed online 12 April, 2010 via <<http://marytudorpainting-sawston.blogspot.com/>>.

¹⁶ This is most evident in John Guy's report for Sothebys, where he focuses his entire discussion on the identification of the sitter and seems to accept the historical notion that the picture has always resided at Sawston Hall.

¹⁷ For more on Sir John Huddleston see S.T. Bindoff, *The House of Commons 1509-1558*, Vol. 4, London: Secker and Warburg, 1982, 401-403.

¹⁸ In 1919 a catalogue of pictures at Sutton Place was published that includes several Tudor portraits. Although the purpose of the catalogue is not entirely clear, it appears that there was a picture and tapestry sale at Sutton Place that same year and this catalogue was for that sale. And, in spite of the fact that the catalogue does not include the Russ picture, one can assume that either the picture had already been sold out of the collection by 1919, or that the picture was still in the collection and was simply not part of the catalogue. According to Christopher Wickham (personal communication, 14 April 2010) the picture may have entered the Russ collection in the early 1900s, although evidence of how this occurred has yet to come to light. For more on the Sutton Place sale see *Catalogue of the Pictures and of the Tapestries in Sutton Place* (London, 1919), 1-43.

Denys, the Westons or the myriad of other owners and tenants at Sutton Place prior to the early eighteenth century.

Recently John Guy has argued that this work is probably a portrait of Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox.²⁷ His primary argument is based upon dress and jewels. He suggests that the gown and jewels that the lady wears are entirely consistent with the kind of portrait a person of royal blood, such as Margaret, would commission during a time in which her husband was having trouble abroad.²⁸ He notes, "...the sitter's lack of passementerie of gold and silver thread, and the absence of expensive gloves and jewels other than a simple brooch, would fit perfectly with Douglas's need to balance her status as the king's more favoured niece with tact at a time when her whole future depended on her husband's ability to juggle his role in Scotland."²⁹

In fact, Margaret was a woman who clearly appreciated fine attire. During the 1540s, for example, she drew down more than 1000 yards of expensive fabrics from the royal stores; this amount was only slightly less than the princesses royal.³⁰ And although Guy notes that Margaret requested a great deal of black silks and velvets, she also requests an equal amount of damask and brocades of various colors, including red.³¹

Guy also argues for a date of 1547 for this portrait, claiming that the dress this sitter wears can be firmly dated to this period. However Janet Arnold has dated French gowns with high standing collars—such as this sitter wears—to the mid-

1550s.³² And, during the 1550s Margaret owned many expensive gowns, including gowns of 'tissue' (probably gold or silver tissue) and embroidered kirtles.³³ As such, it seems unlikely that a woman with these kinds of expensive and decorative gowns would prefer rather plain garb for such a portrait, particularly when she was in such favor with Mary I.

Further, the woman in the Russ portrait is nearly entirely devoid of the kind of jewels that a woman who was being "maintained as a Queen's daughter" would have worn.³⁴ For Christmas 1553, for example, Mary I gave Margaret "a gyrdill of golde sett through[ou]t with diamond[e]s and rubies' as well as 'a paynted dyamant of greate valew.' These are the kinds of jewels that one would expect to see in a portrait of a woman of the rank of Margaret Douglas, particularly during the period in which she was in high favor as she was in the 1540-50s. Instead, the Russ portrait sitter wears very few jewels and none of them of great value.

Unfortunately, because of the condition of the picture, it is difficult to know just who this sitter could be. The face of the pendant (or clock?) she holds is so badly overpainted and damaged that any attempt at locating the object within the extant inventories would seem fruitless. Further, without an inscription or other telltale clues, and without further information about her identity through the available provenance, there is little likelihood that her identity will ever be conclusively proven.

1480-1640," in *Architectural History* 41, 1998, 14-29. For more on inventories specific to Tudor paintings see Susan Foister, "Paintings and other works of art in sixteenth-century English inventories," *The Burlington Magazine* 123, 1981, 273-82.

²⁷ Dr. Guy was commissioned to write a detailed evaluation of the portrait by Sotherbys (London), in the hopes that he would be able to identify the sitter prior to the picture's sale at auction.

²⁸ John Guy, *Historical Report*, 15. In fact, the portrait was catalogued for auction at Sotherbys (London Sales Rooms, 7 July, 2010, Lot 4) as 'Portrait of a Lady, Probably Lady Margaret Douglas.'

²⁹ John Guy, *Historical Report*, 15.

³⁰ Maria Hayward, *Dress at the Court of King Henry VIII*, (London: Maney Publishing), 2007, 202-3 and Table 11.1. Guy also suggests that Margaret would not have worn passementerie of gold or silver (13). However, in late 1536 she received a package of silver passementerie at court. See *Letters and Papers...Henry VIII*, R.O. Dec. 1536, 1396, for more.

³¹ Hayward, Op Cit.

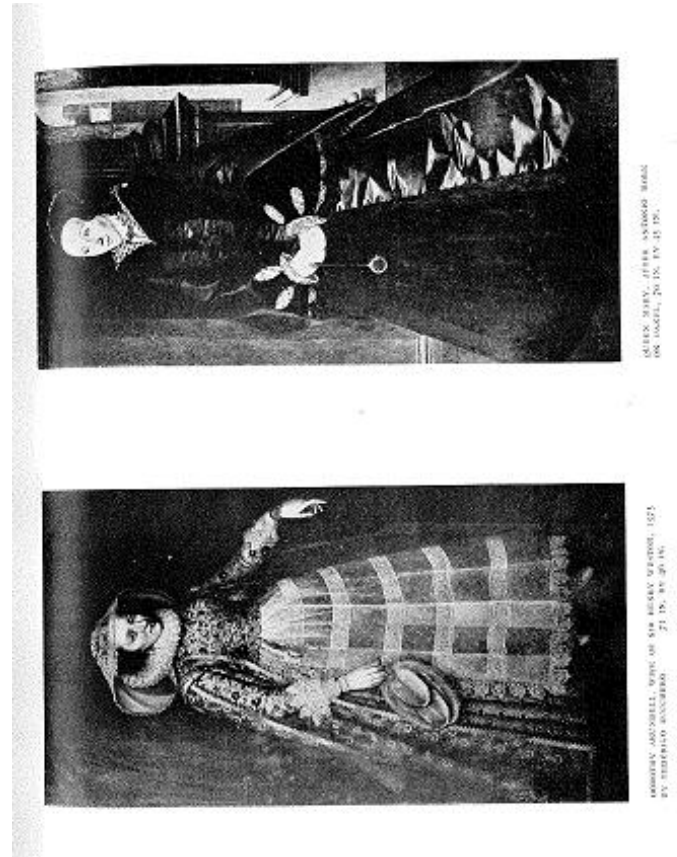
³² Janet Arnold (2001), *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd* (London: Maney), 117. This portrait can also be compared with the Fitzwilliam Museum's *Portrait of an Unknown Lady* (#1), who is wearing a dress of nearly the same style.

³³ TNA, SP 12/22, fos. 77-7v.

³⁴ John Guy, *Historical Report*, 12.



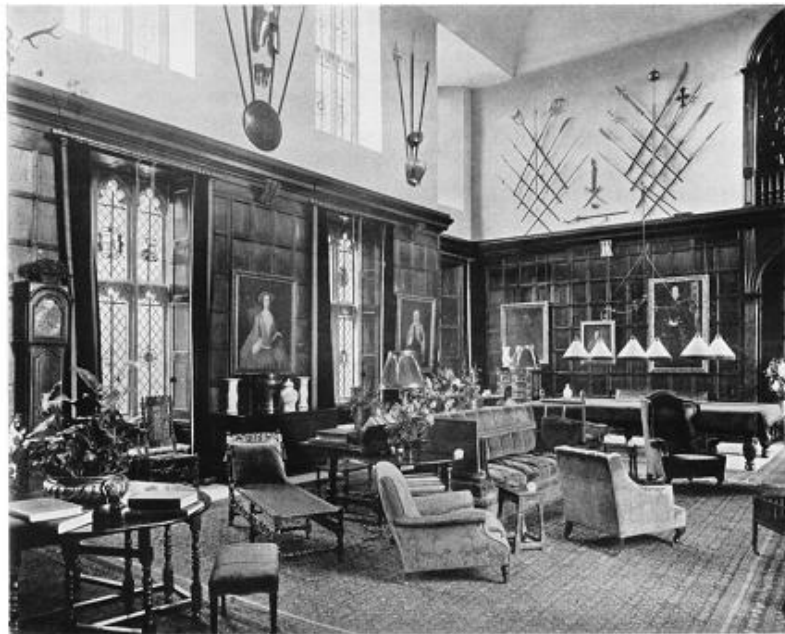
Francis Frith [Photographer and Publisher]
Great Hall, Sutton Place
1914
Postcard Number 67045³⁵



From Leonard Willouby's "Sutton Place, Guilford: A Surrey Manor House-Part II," *The Connoisseur* 26(101), January 1910, 5.

³⁵ It is possible to date Frith postcards by their print numbers. This card is number 67045, which places it within the 1914 window of 66516 through 67714. For more on dating Frith postcards see the *Old Postcard Postcards Archive* at <http://www.oldpicturepostcard.co.uk/dating-frith-postcards.htm>, accessed online 4 May, 2010.

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THE GREAT HALL

[Above and Right] From Robert Dell's "A Tudor Manor House:
Sutton Place," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 7(28), July 1905,
298-9.



PLATE III. THE GREAT HALL,
SUTTON PLACE BY GUILDFORD