



## Mercer connections

Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, 1540-1614

Henry Howard, courtier, statesman and founder of almshouses at Greenwich, Castle Rising and Clun, remains an enigmatic figure. Largely out of favour, and several times imprisoned during the reign of Elizabeth I, he gained favour under James I, holding many important offices and being created Earl of Northampton. In 1614 he bequeathed to the Mercers' Company his Greenwich almshouse, now known as Trinity Hospital.

Born at Shotesham, Norfolk in 1540, Howard was seven when his father Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, was executed for treason. The family clawed its way back, however, and Elizabeth I paid for the brilliant young nobleman's education at King's College, Cambridge.

Elizabeth's favour was not to last. Howard's older brother Thomas, 4th Duke of Norfolk, plotted to marry the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots and was executed in 1572. Henry, a Catholic sympathiser, had also illicitly corresponded with Mary; he was arrested and imprisoned several times.

Howard regained his position at Court in 1597, as Elizabeth's reign was drawing to an end. He brought himself to the attention of her heir, James VI of Scotland, by supplying James with information about the English court. He did not spare his fellow courtiers, insinuating, for instance, that Sir Walter Raleigh was in secret correspondence with Spain.

On James's accession, Howard received many royal favours: he was appointed a Privy Councillor in 1603 and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in January 1604; two months later, James created him Earl of Northampton and Baron Marnhull in the County of Dorset.

Howard's power grew. In 1605 James made him a Knight of the Garter, Lord Privy Seal and one of the commissioners charged with negotiating peace with Spain, which earned him an annual pension of £1,000. By 1609 he was elected High Steward

of the University of Oxford, and three years later, Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. It was in 1612, when leader of the six Treasury Commissioners, that he turned for advice to Lionel Cranfield, a wealthy Mercer and Greenwich landowner later to be the Earl of Middlesex. Through his patronage of Cranfield and Thomas Dalby, Clerk to the Mercers' Company, Howard must have learned of the Mercers' trusteeship of the wills of Richard Whittington, John Colet and others, and he resolved to entrust his almshouse at Greenwich to the Company. Cranfield was Master in 1615 when the Company agreed to the terms of trusteeship.

Henry Howard died unmarried in 1614 – before his role in a murder at the Tower of London involving the breakdown of his great-niece's marriage to Lord Essex could be exposed.

As Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, he was buried in St Margaret's Chapel in Dover Castle. His marble sarcophagus lay under a canopy surrounded by the four virtues and cherubs, topped by a kneeling statue of

himself in Garter robes and armour.

By 1696 the chapel was in such danger of falling down that the Mercers won leave to remove the tomb to Trinity Hospital Greenwich. That chapel, too, fell into disrepair and the tomb had to be broken up in 1812. Only the statue remains there today, a monument to a man whose life of ambition and political wiles contrasts with a legacy of abiding philanthropy. **M**

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