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**CRAFTING A LEGACY – THE LATE WIDOWHOOD OF LADY ELIZABETH COOKE  
HOBY RUSSELL, 1590-1609**

by

**Frankie Kristine Urrutia-Smith**

**Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for graduation with**

**UNIVERSITY HONORS**

**with a major in**

**History  
in the Department of History**

**Approved:**

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**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, UT**

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Crafting a Legacy: The Late Widowhood of Lady Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell  
1590-1609

Lady Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell is known as one of the remarkably educated Cooke sisters of the Elizabethan period. She married first Thomas Hoby and then John Russell and had seven children. After being widowed twice, Elizabeth became known as a powerful courtier. She was a devout Protestant and became famous for barring Shakespeare from building the Globe Theatre in her neighborhood. Although many scholars have addressed the period of early widowhood in Elizabeth's life, few have directly investigated how her life may have changed in its last decade. This paper will explore how Lady Russell crafted her own legacy using print publication and funeral monument design.

Elizabeth and her sisters were recognized by their contemporaries as capable scholars, but Elizabeth published her first full-length translation of a work in 1605, only four years before her death. The finished publication reveals important messages which Elizabeth wanted the reader to understand about her family, her social status, and her religious beliefs. Also invaluable to this study are the funeral monuments commissioned by Elizabeth, including her own. Using strong visual imagery and well-crafted epitaph writing, Elizabeth intentionally preserved the memories of herself and her family.

The aims of this paper are to illustrate the importance of historical self-expression to modern understanding and the value of the study of women in late adulthood.

### Acknowledgements:

First, I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Susan Cogan for her guidance, encouragement, and expertise. Dr. Cogan has provided invaluable help throughout every stage of this project and throughout my undergraduate career at Utah State University. I will forever be grateful for her mentorship.

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Thank you, as well, to the members of faculty and staff in both the History and Honors Departments, without whom such amazing opportunities would not be available for the students at USU.

Lastly, a huge thank-you to my supportive family and friends, especially my husband Levi. Thank you for believing in and encouraging me all along the way.

In 1540, Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell was born to Anthony Cooke and his wife, Anne Fitzgerald in Gidea Hall, Essex. Elizabeth lived to be 69 years old and died in 1609. She outlived two husbands, four children, and Queen Elizabeth I, as well as countless other family members. Elizabeth lived a remarkable life which has been analyzed by many previous studies, but the last decades of her life are relatively unknown to history, especially after she moved away from London to live with her son Edward and his family in Bisham, Berkshire. Although these later years are rarely discussed, much of Elizabeth's preserved cultural output was produced during this time. This thesis argues that Elizabeth spent her late widowhood consciously creating her own legacy and explores the ways in which Elizabeth did so as well as the effect of her efforts on our modern understanding of her as a historical character. In order to complete this analysis, a brief synopsis of her life will be given, followed by an analysis of her legacy-building efforts, and concluded with a note about modern interpretations of her life and work.

Elizabeth was one of five daughters and four sons born to Anne and Anthony Cooke. Anthony, a former tutor to Prince Edward, later King Edward VI of England, highly valued the role of education in elite society and the potential for social mobility which it offered. As a result Anthony hired only the best tutors for his daughters, ensuring that they learned Latin, Greek, philosophy, and most importantly, Protestant Christianity. The daughters were highly regarded in their communities for being extremely well-educated and for their connections to other powerful people. Historian Marjorie McIntosh has described the rotating cast of tutors in the Cooke household as the "Cooke University for females," quoting a contemporary of the family as

having said that Anthony was “a man happy in his Daughters, whom having brought up in Learning, both Greek and Latine (sic), above their Sex, he married to men of good Account.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1558, when she was 18 years old, Elizabeth was married to her first husband, Thomas Hoby. Thomas and Elizabeth lived at his family estate at Bisham Abbey until 1566, when they were assigned to travel to Paris as ambassadors from Queen Elizabeth I. Thomas died in Paris under mysterious circumstances at the court of Charles IX later that year, leaving Elizabeth to organize the passage of her small family back to England, departing in the middle of the night in case any others from their retinue were in danger. Elizabeth had given birth to four children with Thomas, two sons and two daughters. Both daughters died in childhood, but the two sons, Edward and Thomas Posthumous, both outlived their mother. The Hoby family line held control of Bisham Abbey until the last of the Hoby line died in 1766.<sup>2</sup>

After several years of widowhood, Elizabeth married again, this time to Lord John Russell, in 1574. Their marriage lasted 10 years, until John died weeks before inheriting the title of the Earl of Bedford after the death of his uncle. Their only son, Francis, had died in infancy, but two daughters survived from their marriage, Elizabeth and Anne. The younger Elizabeth predeceased her mother when she died as a teenager, but Anne grew into an adult with a title and family of her own. Elizabeth fought a long legal battle to have herself and her daughters recognized as the heiresses of the Earl of Bedford, but it was not successful because other male heirs were eager to step in. Never one to give up easily, Elizabeth defied English tradition and

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, “Sir Anthony Cooke: Tudor Humanist, Educator, and Religious Reformer.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 119, no. 3. (June 1975): 233-250

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Burstall, *The Story of All Saints’ Parish Church Bisham*, (1990), 26.

placed her daughters in their father's funeral procession as a message to the authorities that they were, indeed, his heirs.

Elizabeth, like many elite women of the early modern period, discovered that widowhood was a powerful position for a woman to hold. Granted a legal identity of her own, no longer restrained by the decisions of a husband or father, and wealthy enough to conduct her affairs as she pleased, Elizabeth took full advantage of this new stage of her life. As the guardian of her two young sons, she was granted power over the finances of their inheritance and the right to live in the London home belonging to the Hoby family title. As a landlady, she also held control of several other estates in the country. Her tenants complained about her lack of mercy as a rent collector. She even confiscated a herd of cattle once in lieu of unpaid rent on a pasture called Powden Field.<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth also exercised her perceived right of advowsons (the naming rights to a parish living) for the Rectory of King's Langley until, in 1595, a dismissed rector named John Kettle protested so loudly that Elizabeth signed over her naming rights to the Queen.<sup>4</sup>

The achievement for which she is most well-known in the modern period was her large-scale protest of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. Originally, Shakespeare planned to build the Globe in the London neighborhood of Blackfriars. A building in that neighborhood had served as the rehearsal space for the choirs of boys who sang at St. Paul's Cathedral a few blocks away, and Shakespeare purchased the lot, intending to tear down the building to construct the theatre.

Elizabeth, as a devout Protestant, was immediately offended at the idea of a theatre in her neighborhood. Concerned that a theatre would bring the least desirable of Londoners to her

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<sup>3</sup> The National Archives, C 3/248/17.

<sup>4</sup> The National Archives, LR 14/1003.

street, she spent months rallying her neighbors, pulling strings among her social network to convince even Shakespeare's own favorite printer to sign a petition against the construction of the theatre. Once the petition had been signed, Elizabeth took it to the government, even delivering her case to the Star Chamber and the Queen herself. In the end, despite Queen Elizabeth's fondness for theatre and for Shakespeare, he and the other investors were forced to choose a new building site on the other side of the Thames for the Globe. For her part in the Globe case and her connection to one of the most famous Elizabethan names, Shakespeare, Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell has been remembered in the modern period as the woman who did not want to see the completion of the Globe. Recently, Chris Laoutaris constructed his entire biography of Elizabeth around this incident, likely knowing that it is one of the better-known events of her life.<sup>5</sup> She is touted as one of the powerful widows of her era. The accomplishments of her life after this episode have been praised individually, but are rarely considered as a separate stage of life. In seeking to understand the significance of this unique stage, it is important to differentiate between her political activities as a young widow in London and the work she put forth toward crafting her own legacy as an elderly widow at Bisham. As a young widow, Elizabeth performed the typical duties of widowhood, including raising her children and managing the family's resources. Like 37% of widows, however, Elizabeth outlived her husband by more than 20 years, leaving her single and unlikely to marry again for a large portion of her life.<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth built her legacy during those last years after her children took over many of the family matters.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on Elizabeth Russell and William Shakespeare, see: Chris Laoutaris, *Shakespeare and the Countess: the Battle that Gave Birth to the Globe*, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara J.Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550 : Marriage and Family, Property and Careers*, (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2002). ProQuest Ebook Central, 128.



When the Hoby sons, Edward and Thomas Posthumous, came of age to take control of their inheritance, Elizabeth lost much of the income she had been accustomed to controlling. Edward sold her the house in the Blackfriars so that she could stay in London while her daughter, Anne, was still a child. Although Elizabeth retained several jointure properties from her two marriages, historian Elizabeth Farber has evaluated the worth of those properties and determined that not only was the income insufficient to pay for her daughters' dowries, it was "not even enough to dress them stylishly."<sup>7</sup>

Anne entered the service of the Queen's Court as a teenager in the 1590s, and Elizabeth moved to Bisham at some time after that. The date of her move is unclear, but it is clear from the manuscript evidence that she lived in Bisham for at least several years before her death. When Elizabeth moved to Bisham, she seems to have faded out of public life in London. For example, since she was not attending important court cases, she began to ask Robert Cecil to attend in her stead.<sup>8</sup> Despite many claims to ill health and poverty which prevented her from visiting London family members, Elizabeth did host Anne's extravagant wedding at the house in the Blackfriars in 1600.<sup>9</sup> After that event, there are no records of sociability in that home, and even though the younger Elizabeth Russell died in 1061, 1601? there is no evidence that her funeral was held in the Blackfriars.<sup>10</sup> Knowing that such a powerful woman may not have been

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Farber, "The Letters of Elizabeth Russell, 1540-1609." (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1977), 117-118.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth, L. R. (1606). Elizabeth, lady russell, to the earl of salisbury. Hertfordshire: The Marquess of Salisbury. Retrieved from <https://login.dist.lib.usu.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.dist.lib.usu.edu/docview/1858044749?accountid=14761>

<sup>9</sup> British Library, Lansdowne MS 76/82, is a 1594 letter from Elizabeth to her nephew Robert, describing the various illnesses which prevented her from vising with him. Despite her "shooting payne and swimming brayne," Elizabeth was recovered well enough to host a society wedding several years later.

<sup>10</sup> The Westminster Abbey monument to the younger Elizabeth does not mark her actual burial place, which is unknown as of this writing. It is assumed that Elizabeth was buried in or near the land which had been her father's, in Bedfordshire.

content with a quiet lifestyle of needlework, this research project seeks to answer the question, “what was Elizabeth Russell doing in her late widowhood?” The answer, based on archival research and the analysis of material culture in London and Bisham Abbey, is that Elizabeth spent her late widowhood crafting the legacy for which she wished to be remembered.

### **A Way of Reconciliation....**

Lady Elizabeth first worked to establish her legacy on paper. In 1605, at the age of 77, Elizabeth translated a book entitled *A Way of Reconciliation of a Good and learned man, Touching the Trueth Nature, and Substance of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament* from Latin into English. By doing so, she demonstrated two of her most notable traits: her sharp Protestantism and her talent as a scholar. In addition, the completed work emphasized Elizabeth’s familial connections to powerful people. These three characteristics, Protestantism, scholasticism, and possession of a prestigious family are also three of the traits Elizabeth is most recognized for in the modern period, which, as I argue, Elizabeth engineered.

The topic of Elizabeth’s translated work reflects her Protestant and even proto-Puritan beliefs by emphasizing one of the major differences between Catholic and Protestant Christianity at that time, which was the nature of the Eucharist. By doing so, she engaged with the central religious and political debates of her society. Catholics argued in favor of transubstantiation, in which the bread and wine of the Eucharist is miraculously transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which had been preached in medieval Catholicism since at least the eleventh century.<sup>11</sup> Most Protestants, on the other hand, thought of the Eucharist as a symbolic gesture and

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<sup>11</sup> Gary Macy, "The Medieval Inheritance," in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, ed. Lee Palmer Wandel, 1st ed., vol. 46, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013).

were deeply offended by the idea of actually eating the body of Christ.<sup>12</sup> While it is impossible to trace how many everyday people truly believed one or the other of these arguments, the elite certainly took an interest in the issue. Elizabeth was no exception and chose to translate a work which argued for the symbolic interpretation.

In addition to the subject matter, Elizabeth's Protestant beliefs can also be seen in the translation of the book itself. Another major tenet of Protestantism, especially during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, was that religious texts should be available to people in their native language so that they could develop a personal relationship with God. As Debra Rienstra wrote, "Protestant scholars considered their work vital in educating the public in scripture and true doctrine."<sup>13</sup> Since the Bible had already been translated into English and condensed into the now-required Book of Common Prayer, men and women of Elizabeth's social station would translate other texts on a religious topic into their native language. This act of translation was a statement of Protestant belief in its own right, almost regardless of the translation's contents. Catholic women very often did the same, although they translated different types of texts, in order to show off their own learning. As Danielle Clark has identified, the translation of secondary religious works "found an eager and ready readership in the emergent class of literary women" in general.<sup>14</sup> Thus, by publishing a translated book under her own name, Elizabeth solidified her reputation as a Protestant Christian.

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<sup>12</sup> For a thorough review of the debates surrounding the nature of the Eucharist during the Reformation, see: Lee Palmer Wandel, ed., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*, 1st ed., vol. 46, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Debra Rienstra, "Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, Psalmes," in *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 114.

<sup>14</sup> Danielle Clark, "Translation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 170.

Although many elite men of the Elizabethan period translated and published their own versions of important Christian works, the publishing world was less easily accessible to women. In the first place, women were not often expected to learn the elite languages of Latin, Greek, and sometimes Hebrew required to translate these texts. Secondly, due to restrictions on women's legal identities, they often could not sign a publishing contract on their own. The context of Elizabeth's contract with her publisher is unknown, but it is likely that she was allowed to have a personal contract only because she was a widow.

Translations of religious texts were not the only popular translations in the sixteenth century. Thanks to the humanist movement, it was fashionable to engage with classical texts of any kind.<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth was well-known among her peers for being a talented scholar of the classics.<sup>16</sup> John Harrington, an English author and translator, even sent his newly completed manuscript chapter to her asking her for personal patronage and to distribute the work to those men (with money) who might also appreciate it.<sup>17</sup> His book, *The Metamorphosis of Ajax*, was apparently based on classical themes, which Elizabeth was familiar with from her humanist education, including the translation of classical works. Understanding that Elizabeth would have been capable of many different types of translation makes her choice of a religious text even more powerful because it is clear that she valued her religion over humanist tradition. Elaine Bellin has said that by publishing this particular work, Elizabeth was projecting an image of

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<sup>15</sup> Marcy North, "Women, the Material Book, and Early Printing," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), 69.

<sup>16</sup> McIntosh, "Sir Anthony Cooke..."

<sup>17</sup> British Library Lansdowne MS 82/88.

herself as having “pious concern for the true religion,” and Patricia Demers considers all of the Cooke sisters to be involved in the zealous religious debates of their day.<sup>18</sup>

Elizabeth's byline on the title page of *A Way of Reconciliation* was carefully chosen to reflect the close ties between herself and the nobility, referring to herself as “The Right Honourable Lady Elizabeth Russell, Dowager to the Right Honourable Lord John Russell, Baron, and sonne and heire to Francis Earle of Bedford.”<sup>19</sup> This is, in part, Elizabeth’s reaction to the lengthy court battle in which she had fought for recognition of herself and her daughters as heiresses of the earldom. She had lost the court battle, or she would have referred to herself more simply as “Dowager Countess of Bedford,” but she clearly wanted to emphasize her connection to the great families of England. Although it may have been less convenient for the printer, costlier for Elizabeth, and less easily read by her readers, the full title was so important that it was included while the full name of the printer himself was not.<sup>20</sup> It was so important because Elizabeth wanted the reader to understand how closely related she was to an earl and therefore how much power she wielded. Despite the fact that John had been dead for more than 20 years by 1605, Elizabeth still defined her own authority through her relationship to him. As previous research has indicated, Elizabeth’s main sources of political influence were her powerful family

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<sup>18</sup> Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987), page number.

Patricia Demers, *Women's Writing in English*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005), page number.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Russell, Dowager, *Way of Reconciliation of a Good and Learned Man Touching the Trueth, Nature, and Substance of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament* (London: R. Barker, 1605), accessed April 24, 2019, [http://gateway.proquest.com/dist.lib.usu.edu/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:99837034](http://gateway.proquest.com/dist.lib.usu.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99837034).

<sup>20</sup> The printer’s name is listed as “R.B.” This was later determined to stand for R. Baker, according to the catalog record for the book at Early English Books Online.

members.<sup>21</sup> Most of these men and women had died long before 1605, so it was important that she include those details to strengthen her own authority despite their loss.

Additionally, Elizabeth included a reference to the powerful female network through which she also claimed authority in the dedication of *A Way of Reconciliation* when she dedicated the work “To The Right honourable my most entierly beloued and onely daughter the Lady Anne Herbert, wife to the Lord Henry Herbert, sonne and heire apparent to Edward the most noble Earle of Worcester. Many of the familial connections which guaranteed Elizabeth’s authority were the result of the powerful female network of which she was a part. As a young woman, Elizabeth’s sisters brought powerful men into the family fold, and eventually, her daughter Anne did the same. The most significant of these sisters’ marriages was Mildred’s marriage to William Cecil, a chief advisor to Queen Elizabeth I and one of the most powerful men in England. Through Mildred, William had arranged the marriage of Elizabeth Cooke to Thomas Hoby and later to John Russell. He had also been a powerful patron on her behalf in several major court cases, including her battle with Shakespeare over the Globe Theatre. Later, his son and Elizabeth’s nephew Robert became a powerful official with whom Elizabeth was also in frequent contact.

Just as the important relationship to the Cecil family was formed through Mildred, Elizabeth formed a potentially valuable connection to the Herbert family through the marriage of her daughter, Anne. Anne married Lord Herbert, who would become the first Marquess of Worcester, in 1600. By dedicating the book to Anne, Elizabeth strengthened the bond between

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<sup>21</sup> Gemma Allen, *The Cooke Sisters: Education, Piety and Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

the two families, emphasizing her daughter as the connecting link. Later, Elizabeth would emphasize this link again in the design of her funeral monument.

### **Funeral Monuments:**

The strongest examples of Elizabeth's legacy building are the funerary monuments which she designed for herself and her family. Through these monuments, Elizabeth could express socio-political opinions which she could no longer express in court, using powerful imagery and hand-crafted poetic epitaphs to do so. Lady Russell was one of very few women to design funerary monuments in Elizabethan England, so her work demonstrates a unique contribution to material culture.<sup>22</sup> Art historian Nigel Llewellyn wrote that Elizabethan funeral monuments "were intended to establish in the collective memory and set forever the honourable reputation of the subjects they commemorated," which makes Elizabeth's role as the monument designer vastly important.<sup>23</sup>

Elizabeth began designing funeral monuments for family members as early as the 1550s, when her first husband died.<sup>24</sup> Thomas Hoby's monument features two men, dressed in ceremonial armor, reclining on the top of the tomb. The other man depicted is Thomas' half-brother Philip, who died in 1558. At their feet are carved hobby falcons, known as hobby hawks, symbolizing the Hoby family name, and the front is decorated with family coats of arms. A poem composed by Elizabeth is written around the rim of the tomb and describes Thomas's life and death in service to Queen Elizabeth and the two living sons he left behind. Philip is simply

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<sup>22</sup> Helen Gladstone, "Building an Identity: Two Noblewomen in England, 1566–1666." (PhD diss., Open University, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> Nigel Llewellyn, "Honour in Life, Death and in the Memory: Funeral Monuments in Early Modern England." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996), 179.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix A. for a photograph of Thomas Hoby's funeral monument.

described as having died before he produced children. All of the inscriptions are written in Latin or Greek and composed by Elizabeth herself, showcasing her talent as a scholar. Distributed throughout the design are a series of Tudor roses to strengthen the connection between their family name and the royal household.

It is likely that Elizabeth learned about this style of monument when traveling with Thomas in France, so even the basic design is a symbol of their time in that country. To house it, she commissioned a new chapel to be built at the parish church of Bisham, nearly doubling the size of the building. Hoby family members were then buried in the Hoby chapel, many of them interred beneath engraved stones on the floor, well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> Even in her first attempt at tomb design, Elizabeth sent a powerful message about family and connections to royalty in Thomas' monument. Interestingly, Elizabeth did not leave a place for herself or any of her children on this monument. When Thomas died, all four of their children were still living, and as a woman in her thirties, Elizabeth may have intended to remarry even then. By commemorating Thomas Hoby alongside his brother, Elizabeth emphasized the importance of the family as a whole. While her connection to this family was also on display through her written epitaphs and the names of her children, Elizabeth did not make the mistake of restricting her future marriage options by depicting herself in the monument. Even after returning to Bisham and deciding to have herself interred in the Hoby chapel, Elizabeth did not simply create an addition to her husband's tomb, but commissioned a much more ornate creation for herself, depicting herself as a matriarch without any husband figure at all.

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<sup>25</sup> Patricia Burnstall, *The Story of All Saints Parish Church Bisham*, (1990).



The monument to Elizabeth's second husband, John Russell, is housed in Westminster Abbey, where it has been restored several times since its original installation in 1584.<sup>26</sup> Two of John and Elizabeth's children are memorialized there. Their son, Francis, who died as an infant, is buried in the same tomb as John, and their daughter Elizabeth, who died in her teens, is depicted in a memorial plinth right next to John's monument, although she is likely interred somewhere else because burial spaces in Westminster were expensive and rarely used for unmarried women without a title. Evidence for this can be seen throughout the Abbey, where few women's names are to be found and even fewer without their husbands'. Originally, her plinth even stood within the fence erected around John's tomb.<sup>27</sup> When commissioning John's tomb as a second-time widow, Elizabeth continued to hone her design skills.

The inscriptions on John Russell's tomb increase the visibility of the bonds among the family through the use of emotion and once again showcase Elizabeth's own skill in ancient languages, since they include poems in both Latin and Greek. Along with Elizabeth's poems to John, she included one from Edward Hoby, Elizabeth's son whom John had guided through young adulthood, although he never became a legal guardian to either Edward or Thomas Posthumous Hoby.<sup>28</sup> One heart wrenching poem is even written to baby Francis from his mother.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Dean and Chapter of Westminster, "John and Elizabeth Russell," Westminster Abbey, 2019, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/john-and-elizabeth-russell>. Images of the tombs in Westminster Abbey are under copyright by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. They can be viewed at the link above. A copy of John's tomb can be found under Appendix B.

<sup>27</sup> Dean and Chapter of Westminster, "John and Elizabeth Russell," Westminster Abbey, 2019, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/john-and-elizabeth-russell>.

<sup>28</sup> A translation of this and John's other funeral epitaphs can be found on the Westminster Abbey website, <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/john-and-elizabeth-russell>.

<sup>29</sup> The translation of this poem, found at the link above, reads, "Behold! the grandsire's joy, his sire's delight! my very soul, dire fate hath closed in night! O! that the Almighty will before this day, from this vain world had taken me away! But I in vain expositulate with Jove, who bids me only seek for joys above."

At the top of John's monument, Elizabeth commissioned a statue of the two surviving Russell daughters holding the family crest. This was perhaps the most important part of the monument, and a powerful statement about the rights of the family. Beginning nearly as soon as John had died, Elizabeth fought for her daughters to inherit John's family properties as his true heirs, despite the fact that women had no legal inheritance rights at the time. She had even insisted that the girls be allowed to walk in his funeral procession, which was typically discouraged by the authorities, specifically those at the College of Arms, who were in charge of keeping heraldic genealogies. For a child to walk in the funeral was an indication that the child was the rightful heir of the deceased, which was unlikely because it was very unusual for women to inherit their father's title, so the Russell daughters walking in their father's funeral procession was symbolic of their perceived right to be recognized as inheritors of the Bedford heraldry, which they technically were not.<sup>30</sup> Later, Elizabeth and her daughters took the matter to court. Although she eventually lost the court case, Elizabeth used this platform in one of the state's most significant religious buildings to advocate what she believed to be her daughters' rightful position in society as the children of an Earl.

Since they featured so much of her work and opinions, the monuments of John, Lord Russell and Thomas Hoby commemorate Elizabeth's accomplishments at least as much as they commemorate her dead husbands. She is clearly listed as the author on each epistolary panel, and many of them describe her as a grieving widow rather than to focus on her husband or his successes. For example, this is a selection from John Russell's tomb: "my husbände deare more than this worldes lighte, deathe hath me refte: but I from deathe will take his memorie, to whom

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<sup>30</sup> Chris Laoutaris, *Shakespeare and the Countess: the Battle that Gave Birth to the Globe*, (New York, Pegasus Books, 2014), 139-140.

this tombe I make.”<sup>31</sup> The entire line is about her experience with John’s death, and she gives herself the credit for the design of the tomb, ensuring that anyone who visited would recognize her own skill and virtue. Although a eulogy was expected for Thomas as the dead man, Elizabeth ensured that her own devotion would not be forgotten by weaving their experiences together.

In her poems to Thomas Hoby, Elizabeth bemoaned her single motherhood and even described how she had brought Thomas’ body back to England, clearly centering the narrative of his death on herself. Jessica Malay, writing on this topic, explains that, “Identity is often threatened through crisis, requiring a strategy through which a modified cognition of self can be reestablished,” and that the design of these tombs was Elizabeth’s way of commemorating the dead men while also crafting her new identity.<sup>32</sup> Although her work on the tombs of her husbands was impressive Elizabeth saved the best for last in designing her own tomb, which she did while living with her son Edward during the last few years of her life.

Viewers immediately notice that Elizabeth’s monument is larger and more ornate than those she commissioned for Hoby or Russell.<sup>33</sup> It was constructed in the same chapel at Bisham that she had commissioned to house the tomb of her first husband, Thomas, and it features statues of all of her children from both marriages. Effigies representing the four children who predeceased Elizabeth are mounted in the central canopy of the tomb alongside her own. These are her daughters with Thomas Hoby, Anne and Elizabeth, both of whom died as young children, her son Francis, also depicted on John’s tomb at Westminster, and her daughter with John,

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<sup>31</sup> Dean and Chapter of Westminster, "John and Elizabeth Russell," Westminster Abbey, 2019, , accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/john-and-elizabeth-russell>

<sup>32</sup> Jessica L. Malay, “Elizabeth Russell’s Textual Performances of Self.” *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 37 (2006), 136.

<sup>33</sup> An image of the tomb can be seen in Appendix C.

Elizabeth, who died in her teenage years. We can determine that Lady Russell spent part of the last decade of her life on the design of her own monument because young Elizabeth's effigy is situated among the dead, which dates the design to sometime after her death in 1601.

Her living children are also featured on the monument -the two surviving sons of Elizabeth and Thomas, who were both knights by the time of her death, are positioned behind the tomb, looking towards their mother and their father, whose tomb lies nearby. They kneel in a position of fealty, helmets removed and sheathed swords at their sides. Elizabeth's only living daughter, Anne, kneels in front of her, perhaps ready to receive religious instruction and authority from a book propped on a lectern between them. Such imagery implies that Anne is receiving Elizabeth's legacy. Elizabeth is dressed in her widow's weeds, marking her as the dowager she called herself. Anne is depicted as dressed somewhat more sumptuously than she was probably supposed to according to her rank at the time of Elizabeth's death, but Elizabeth never stopped insisting that her family had achieved the rank of nobility, and indeed Anne became a countess when her husband, Lord Herbert, was named Earl of Worcester in 1628, several years after her mother's death, granting one of Elizabeth's greatest wishes. Had she lived long enough, Anne would have also progressed to the rank of marchioness when he was elevated as Marquess of Worcester in 1642.

Elizabeth did not save the inscription writing for her husbands, either. Latin and Greek on panels throughout the monument display her expertise in those languages, still strong nearly 70 years after her first lessons. These examples are relevant to the study because they indicate the view of Elizabeth in modern pop culture. Notably, no surviving family members wrote epitaphs to Elizabeth -- all of the writing on the tomb is her own.

The Tudor Rose theme, a direct reference to the English royal family and especially to Elizabeth I, is consistent throughout all of the monuments designed by Elizabeth, even though her own was designed several years after James I ascended the throne. Although Tudor Roses had become a popular design feature throughout Elizabeth I's long reign, their frequent use implies a deeper level of commitment to the Queen than mere aesthetic appreciation. The excessive use of the Tudor Rose may have been intended as a protest against James VI/I, who had taken the English throne after the death of Queen Elizabeth I. One hint that the Hoby family was not supportive of James's reign is another tomb in the family chapel, this time marking the burial of Edward's wife, Margaret Carey. Margaret was the daughter of Henry Carey, who was the son of Mary Boleyn, possibly through a secret affair with Henry VIII, which made Margaret either a cousin or niece of Queen Elizabeth I. Margaret's tomb, designed by Edward, features the swans and roses symbolic of the Tudor House and an epitaph including her lineage and. The evidence of this memorial, combined with the knowledge that both Hoby sons had been knighted by Queen Elizabeth and both Russell daughters had served in her household, is evidence that Elizabeth would have used her own tomb to profess her loyalty to the Tudor line instead of the Stuart.

Funeral monuments from the 17<sup>th</sup> century often expressed the political opinions of their commissioners, especially when it came to loyalty to the crown. Jan Broadway wrote about other families who had used Tudor symbolism on their funeral monuments to express loyalty to a particular ruler.<sup>35</sup> James himself used funeral monuments as a battlefield for loyalty between his family and the Tudor's. For example, he buried Elizabeth I in the same space as her sister, Mary

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<sup>35</sup> Jan Broadway, "Symbolic and Self-Consciously Antiquarian: The Elizabethan and Early Stuart Gentry's Use of the Past." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2013): 548. doi:10.1525/hlq.2013.76.4.541.

I, which was clearly intended as an insult because Elizabeth and Mary had been rivals throughout their lives. He also commissioned a tomb for his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, in Westminster Abbey, and moved her remains to the Abbey from their original burial place at Peterborough Cathedral. Mary had been beheaded for treason in 1587, after having been suspected of plotting Elizabeth's death for decades. As a further insult to the Tudors, Mary Queen of Scots' memorial was larger and grander than the combined tomb of Mary I and Elizabeth I. James' greatest insult, however, was the epitaph on his mother's monument, which names her as, "certain heiress to the throne of England while she lived."<sup>36</sup> In her work designing funeral monuments, Elizabeth was engaging with the same early modern tradition as James had.

### **The Will:**

In addition to her symbolic gestures of legacy building, Lady Russell also left a corporeal legacy in the form of her wills. Although Elizabeth is seen in retrospect as a female figure breaking the boundaries of her gender, her will is evidence that she often maintained the traditions of patriarchy. Edward and Thomas, Elizabeth's first beneficiaries, represent Elizabeth's dedication to the masculine status quo. So, too, does her selection of witnesses. Seven men were asked to witness this document. Two were members of the nobility (including Anne's husband, Lord Herbert), three came from the local gentry, and the remaining two held no title but lived in the area. By acknowledging each level of the social order, Elizabeth expressed a belief in the prevailing social arrangement, as well as its inherent patriarchy. Despite her own legal efforts to receive an inheritance for herself and her daughters, she granted no concession to

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<sup>36</sup> Dean and Chapter of Westminster, "Mary Queen of Scots," Westminster Abbey, 2019, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/royals/mary-queen-of-scots>.

either the widows or the daughters of her inheritors, with one notable exception – should each of the brothers die without a living male heir, Anne would inherit the land in her own right.

Crafted around 1601, after the death of her daughter Elizabeth, the last version of Lady Russell's will occupies some 24 square feet of parchment and is still intact, including the seals of herself and seven witnesses. The will details the line of inheritance for a piece of land belonging to Elizabeth, through her eldest sons and all of their sons, until finally arriving at her youngest daughter, Anne. Although the contents of the will are interesting in that they illuminate inheritance patterns, even more interesting are the names included as witnesses at the bottom, because they are exemplary of the types of relationships which Elizabeth intended to portray in her life.

Elizabeth's will is fairly standard, an example of the traditional preference for the male heir and the expected inclusion of the sister at the very end. It was long out of necessity, in case one or more of the children died and there was any confusion about rightful inheritance. It was also thorough, describing in detail that only a son born within a rightful marriage counted as a rightful heir, and listing the potential uses for which the land could be used by its owner. In several court cases during the preceding decades, Elizabeth had fought over the same patch of land with individuals claiming that she was overcharging rent or that it was rightfully theirs. Having defended it for so long, Elizabeth now had the right to distribute it as she saw fit. Wills represent an important aspect of legacy building because they determine the very real financial legacy which a person has left. Because English probate records have been preserved, the will is sometimes the only legacy of a person which remains. Elizabeth's will is therefore an important contribution to the overall legacy she was crafting throughout her late widowhood. Like her

other efforts, the will emphasizes the importance of family connections and personal success, as well as the way in which Elizabeth's legacy was directly related to her children.

### **Leaving a Legacy for her Children:**

Elizabeth expressed her own desire to leave a legacy for her children in the dedication of her published work: "I haue left to you, as my last Legacie, this Booke. A most precious Iewelle to the Comfort of your soule."<sup>37</sup> The idea of one's children as a living legacy is not unique to the modern period, especially in terms of how women understood their contribution to the world through their offspring. As exemplified in the dedication of her book, the design of her funeral monument, and the construction of her will, Lady Russell also considered her children themselves to be her legacy. Just as she had previously emphasized the greatness of her ancestors and relatives of her own generation, Elizabeth prided herself on the accomplishments of her children and their families.

By the time of her death, Elizabeth had fewer surviving children than dead children, but she remembered each and every one of them on her tomb, even the infant Francis (d. 1581) who had lived just long enough to be baptized. The political statements contained within the monument are strong, but so is the emotion of a mother who has lost many children. Susan Karant-Nunn, a historian of emotion, has said that Protestants typically refrained from the excessive grief which had been common in Catholicism, but that depictions of grieving motherhood, such as the Virgin Mary in the Pieta, were also still prevalent in society.<sup>38</sup> In her

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<sup>37</sup>Russell, A2.

<sup>38</sup> Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 193-95.



own tomb, Elizabeth melded this restraint and motherly grief in a way that was socially acceptable for her time.

At the same time, Elizabeth's hope for her living children to surpass her own accomplishments is also powerful. As the historian Helen Gladstone wrote, "Maternal affection was mixed with Lady Russell's striving after higher status for her daughters."<sup>39</sup> The image of Anne kneeling before her mother, ready to receive her legacy, is especially striking. Even the statues of her two sons, although they kneel behind the other children, emanate power and success. The implication is that although several pieces of Elizabeth had died as children, several pieces also survived as adult progeny who served as a living legacy for their mother even more than for their respective fathers.

Elizabeth's efforts at crafting a legacy during her "retirement" may have had a great deal to do with the way in which people have talked about her in the centuries since her death. Thanks to the relatively good condition of her funeral monuments and the dedication of the parishioners at Bisham Abbey's parish church, the carefully crafted imagery of hers and her family's accomplishments has been maintained. Her surviving book has preserved her memory in the minds of later scholars and has influenced our judgement of her as a remarkably learned woman.

At the Bisham Abbey parish church, visitors can purchase a pamphlet detailing the history of the building. The pamphlet describes Elizabeth's impact on the community in detail, (a catchy quote from the pamphlet). Photographs of her tomb serve as postcards, and greeting cards feature images of the stained-glass windows. Down the street from the churchyard, the manor house of Bisham Abbey still stands in roughly the same configuration as Elizabeth would have

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<sup>39</sup> Gladstone, 84.

known it, except that it is now a sports center and reception hall. A larger-than-life portrait of Elizabeth, standing by herself, is still on prominent display in the reception hall, so that the community members who choose to celebrate life's milestones there are reminded of her influence.

Other aspects of the community's memory of Elizabeth are very negative, however, and were clearly not intended by the lady herself. Despite their being unintentional, these memories are valuable tools to understand the role Elizabeth played in her community. For example, there is an urban legend that Elizabeth killed a young male family member, either a son or a nephew, because he was slow at his studies.<sup>40</sup> While this story was probably not true, since none of her sons died at the age of a schoolchild, it does illustrate Elizabeth's passion for education and managed the education of her children herself. Another local legend is that Elizabeth's ghost haunts the Great Hall of the manor house at Bisham Abbey, where the fireplace is original to the sixteenth century and her portrait hangs on the wall. You might say that conversations with parishioners revealed the complexities of historical memory about her: on one hand they are very proud to have her as Bisham's most famous former resident but on the other hand they are quick to note that she was not a kind woman. After 410 years, the memory of Elizabeth as a powerful figure of the community still persists, albeit in a rather morbid way.

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<sup>40</sup> Today, Bisham Abbey is a National Sports Centre. The history of the manor, according to the Sports Center, can be found at their website, here: [https://www.bishamabbeynsc.co.uk/bisham\\_abbey/ABOUT\\_History](https://www.bishamabbeynsc.co.uk/bisham_abbey/ABOUT_History). The story of Lady Hoby's ghost can also be found in the publication, *The Story of All Saints Parish Church Bisham*. These examples are relevant to the study because they indicate the view of Elizabeth in modern pop culture. Also refer readers to the relevant volume of the Victoria County Histories.

**Conclusion:**

Despite some modern misconceptions about her, Lady Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell succeeded in crafting her own legacy in the years before her death. She did so with both literary and commemorative methods, creating lasting products in her book and her funeral monument. Although stories from her younger years are more popular, it is these final efforts which have shaped modern analysis of her life and contribution to society. By studying the final years of a powerful, elite, early modern widow, it is possible to more deeply understand the intersections between gender, aging, and power in this period. Due to her longevity and unique capabilities, the late widowhood of Elizabeth Russell is an excellent case study for an investigation of this kind.

Appendix A: Thomas and Philip Hoby's tomb in Bisham All Saints, author's collection.



Appendix B: John Russell's tomb in Westminster, Copyright: Dean and Chapter of Westminster.





Appendix C: Lady Elizabeth Russell's tomb in Bisham All Saints, author's collection.



Word Count: 7,309

## Honors Capstone Reflection

This capstone project represents more than two years of my research experience at Utah State University. I first encountered the letters of Lady Elizabeth Russell in a course on paleography, taught by Dr. Susan Cogan. I took the course during the Spring 2017 semester in preparation for a summer research assistantship with Dr. Cogan, for which I needed to be able to read pre-modern handwriting. One year later, in Spring 2018, I received my first URCO grant to study Lady Elizabeth's letters in more depth. After a year of researching and presenting that work, I received another URCO for the Spring 2019 semester, which funded a two-week archival research trip to London. It was this most recent research which provided the material for my capstone. Because it was funded by a grant, this project gave me experience with the entire research process, including preliminary research, grant writing, research travel, and the composition of an article-length piece.

As with any research project, the first step was preliminary research. In my case, this step took the longest because I spent several years reading and studying Lady Elizabeth before traveling to the archives. From this stage, I learned how to recognize new research questions as I answered the original ones. For example, I began by looking for sources of authority in Lady Elizabeth's life, which led to questions about how she exercised that authority and noticing that it changed over time, which led to my current research question about the intersection of age and gender in her life.

After the preliminary research, I applied for my URCO grant. Although I had previously received one, the first had not requested any additional funding, and that added a dimension of urgency to the application process. Grant writing, as I learned, is unlike other kinds of academic

writing because it requires the researcher to justify both their ideas and their qualifications to pursue those ideas. I gained practice in this type of writing as well as putting together a realistic budget for the cost of such a trip, which I had never done before. This insight to the process of academic research was invaluable because it is not typically available to undergraduates, but I was able to successfully complete it with the help of my mentor. Additionally, I have now had practice in tracking my expenses and reporting costs, another important but overlooked aspect of the research process.

My research trip to England may be the defining event of my undergraduate career. I could not possibly overstate its importance to me, both professionally and personally. On a personal level, I had never travelled overseas before or stayed by myself in a world city. Learning how to navigate and thrive in a new environment has boosted my self confidence in a way that nothing else could have. Professionally, I was privileged to have ongoing training in the archives, since Dr. Cogan was able to be a research guide. Very few undergraduates have such an opportunity for hands-on research in a foreign country, and even fewer have the privilege of on-site training.

One aspect of archival research which can be difficult is obtaining the right permissions to access the documents. In the first place, each archive has its own registration process. Some of them require a pre-registration, others demand a significant portion of time upon arriving at the library. Each has different requirements concerning identification. Although many of the archives I visited are open to the public, I had not realized that there are different levels of security within those archives, some of which also required a letter of recommendation to access.



Knowing the rough outline of this process has increased my confidence in succeeding at navigating future archives, wherever they may be.

Archival research itself was incredibly invigorating. I had never handled documents of the same age or caliber as the ones I was able to access on-site. Thanks to my previous training, I was able to decipher many of the necessary documents, but I also took thousands of pictures documenting everything in case I should need it later. I learned what research methods and what kinds of documents I prefer, and I learned how to give myself time to properly understand a document. Most importantly, I realized the importance of conducting primary source research with physical documents, in addition to their digital counterparts. Although I had encountered the text of several of these documents in digital formats, experiencing the documents themselves was a different experience entirely.

In addition to my work in the archives, I was able to conduct some material culture analysis by visiting the home and burial place of several of my research subjects. Understanding the physical space which these people occupied became central to my thesis. I had seen photographs of the manor and of the monuments, but the firsthand experience was completely different. Even moving through the countryside that Elizabeth moved through was extremely meaningful, since I now know what her environment felt like.

Due to the short time frame between my research trip and graduation, the actual text of the capstone came together very quickly. The biggest take-away from that experience was not to do it again, because it was difficult to organize my thoughts with only a few weeks. As I wrote, I was still processing the information I had received, and ultimately I will need to spend more time with my photos of the documents to properly complete their transcription. One benefit to this

method was that writing through my thoughts helped me to organize them, so I may try that in the future. I certainly gained an appreciation for the amount of work it takes to write a paper of this scale by experiencing it in concentrated form, and it demanded me to use all of the skills I have developed throughout my college career.

My research changed dramatically from beginning to end. Even in this last stage, new information gained importance and my topic adjusted itself. In the beginning of this work, I was interested in the intersection between age and gender, thinking that I would discover something about Elizabeth's later widowhood which would point to societal opinions about the elderly. Instead, my work developed into an analysis of Elizabeth's efforts to build a legacy for herself, which was a surprising but welcome development, especially since it fit well within current historiography while also furthering the field.

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**Bio:**

Frankie Urrutia-Smith is originally from Highland, Utah, which is where she met her husband, Levi. In May 2019, Frankie received a BA in History with minors in Latin and Classical Civilizations as well as an interdisciplinary certificate in Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Magna Cum Laude. As an undergraduate, Frankie participated in research and teaching fellowships as well as conducted her own research. Frankie has received two Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunity Grants from the Office of Research at USU, one of which provided funding for a trip to London, England, to conduct archival research. Additionally, she has presented her work at professional conferences in Utah, Toronto, New Orleans, and Chicago. Frankie has received several awards at Utah State, including the Kiwanis Outstanding Student Award and the Legacy of Utah State Award in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Undergraduate Teaching Fellow of the Year in the Honors Department. In the near future, Frankie will be pursuing a graduate degree in Medieval and Early Modern History, where she hopes to study Basque history as well as the role of women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation movements.