

Margaret Pole's Warblington Castle

by Dr Rachel Delman

In 2024 historian Dr Rachel Delman of the University of Oxford published an article in Issue 15 of *Tudor Places* magazine. In the article Dr Delman considered the life of Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, and argued that her principal residence was at Warblington. She compared the castle to other Tudor residences and suggested, based on in-depth archival research, how the interior may have looked. Dr Delman's abridged article can be read below.

Born Margaret Plantagenet in 1473, the Countess of Salisbury had known both the highs and lows of life before being restored to her lands and properties in 1512 by the young Henry VIII. This now powerful and wealthy woman had four main residences but chose Warblington to be the site of her principal seat. She had inherited the land from her mother, Isabel Neville. The location was well connected and many of Margaret's other lands and properties were located in the south. Moreover, she already owned property in the Isle of Wight.

Building of the castle began sometime after 1515 and was complete by 1525. Very fortuitously we have the building accounts for 1519 kept and audited by Bernard Holden, Rector of Warblington. We know, therefore, that the castle (more like a manor house) was brick built with an inner courtyard. The whole was enclosed within a moat. The buildings were roofed with slate, the chimneys coloured with ochre and the windows glazed. Labourers and most

materials were sourced locally but some luxuries such as Normandy glass and Caen stone were imported from France. Today, all that can be seen of Margaret's castle is an octagonal brick gate tower faced with Caen stone which is now on private land, but dominant in the landscape.

A survey was taken of this 'fair' property in 1632 so we know a great deal about its scale and the probable arrangement of the surrounding landscape. The buildings' footprint was 200 x 200 feet. Conjectured floor plans based on earlier archival evidence can be seen in Fig 1.

The main rooms included a great hall with an adjoining lower parlour, a great parlour, plus great, waiting and dining chambers. Two rooms in a tower above the great parlour close to the household chapel were set aside for Margaret's personal use. They were fitted with large oriel windows featuring heraldic stained glass. Margaret had 73 servants and 11 ladies in waiting including her own granddaughters.

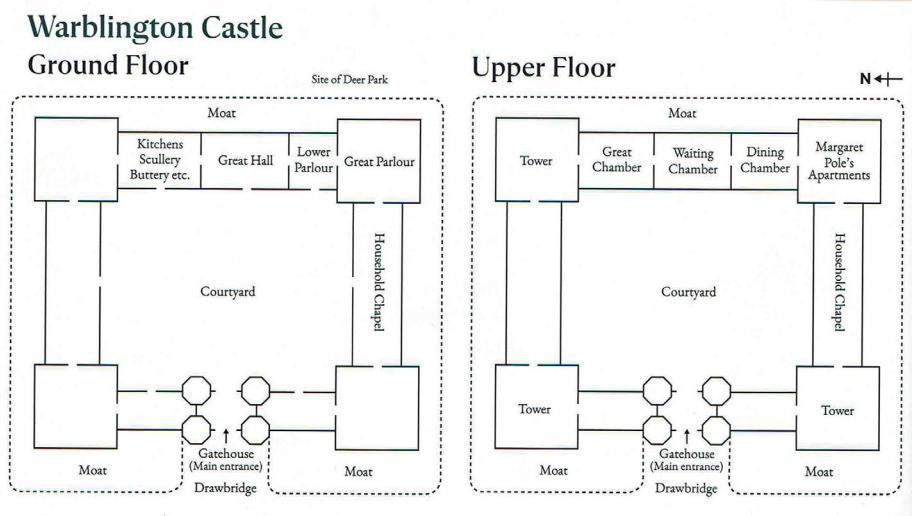


Fig 1

Luxurious and colourful interior

The castle would have been richly decorated. There were nine wall hangings in the great hall depicting the recent 'discovery' of Newfoundland by the Venetian navigator, John Cabot, who had set sail from England at Henry VII's request in 1497. The tapestries likely showed the stages of his voyage and the people, places and animals he encountered on his travels. At the time of Cabot's voyage, Margaret was a member of the royal court. It is possible that the Warblington tapestries showed a scene of Cabot's departure from the court, in which case the Countess may well have figured among the company bidding him farewell.

The great parlour housed seven tapestries depicting the adventures and feats of Ulysses, the Roman name of the Greek Odysseus, hero of Homer's *The Odyssey*. The design of Margaret's tapestries may have resembled a slightly later sequence belonging to Bess of Hardwick which have been on display in the great chamber at Hardwick Hall ever since they were first put there in 1601.

The sumptuous and colourful visual environment was complemented by a rich musical soundscape. Three sets of virginals, keyboard instruments from the harpsichord family, stood in the main waiting chamber, great chamber and great parlour. Their presence likely referenced Margaret's role

as a governess to Catherine of Aragon's daughter, Princess Mary. The Princess practised the virginals as part of her daily routine.

A noble and lavish lifestyle

Warblington Castle had all the appurtenances necessary to support Margaret's noble lifestyle and was even lavish enough to host a visit from the King in 1526.

In the great hall and dining chambers, guests would have enjoyed food and drink served on silver plate and Venetian glass while taking in the rich scenery around them. Several items of tableware showcased Margaret's royal connections, including a silver salt cellar, gilt cup and bowl engraved with roses and portcullises and a cup featuring a rose and the distinctive pomegranate of Catherine of Aragon. Spices used to flavour food included expensive, imported luxuries such as mustard and green ginger, the latter of which Margaret kept among her personal possessions in a silver and gilt box with a little fork to accompany it.

The park, fishponds, orchards and gardens provided additional food and herbs for the table, as well as for medicinal purposes, while the adjacent deer park of 184 acres provided opportunities for hunting and hawking.



The gatehouse is all that remains of Margaret Pole's Warblington Castle

The Catholic Countess was renowned for her pious character. Three chaplains served her household and devotional items in the chapel featured imagery of the Annunciation and the life of Christ. Expensive and luxurious textiles included blue and yellow altar cloths made of sarsenet and vestments of velvet and fustian, a type of heavy woven cloth. There were liturgical books to aid devotion and it is known that Margaret owned a set of coral rosary beads.

Margaret Pole oversaw a busy household and was active in the management of her affairs and estates. However, it was machinations at court that led to her downfall.

She was a staunch Catholic who supported Rome, one son was a Cardinal. Henry VIII's decisions to seek a divorce from the

Catholic Catherine of Aragon, marriage and beheading of the Protestant Anne Boleyn, and the advent of the Reformation led to Margaret's arrest at Warblington in 1538. She was imprisoned and executed for treason at the Tower of London in 1541.

Following Margaret's death, the next long-term owners of Warblington Castle were the Catholic Cotton family who held the property up until the Civil War when much of the building was destroyed.

An inventory compiled by the king's officials during Margaret Pole's arrest provide a snapshot of the castle's layout and furnishings. When considered alongside further archival and archaeological evidence, we gain a vivid impression of Margaret's life at Warblington before her detention.
