



## Margaret Pole: The Countess in the Tower

*Susan Higginbotham*

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Of the many executions ordered by Henry VIII, surely the most horrifying was that of sixty-seven-year-old Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, hacked to pieces on the scaffold by a blundering headsman.

From the start, Margaret's life had been marred by tragedy and violence: her father, George, Duke of Clarence, had been executed at the order of his own brother, Edward IV, and her naïve young brother, Edward, Earl of Warwick, had spent most of his life in the Tower before being executed on orders of Henry VII. Yet Margaret, friend to Catherine of Aragon and the beloved governess of her daughter Mary, had seemed destined for a happier fate, until religious upheaval and rebellion caused Margaret and her family to fall from grace. From Margaret's birth as the daughter of a royal duke to her beatification centuries after her death, *Margaret Pole: The Countess in the Tower* tells the story of one of the fortress's most unlikely prisoners.

## **Margaret Pole: The Countess in the Tower Details**

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# From Reader Review Margaret Pole: The Countess in the Tower for online ebook

## Sarah Bryson says

Susan Higginbotham's book on Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury is a fascinating examination of the life of a woman who has so often been overlooked throughout history. I have read a little about Margaret Pole however this was always in relation to Henry VIII's heartless decision to order her execution under what appeared to be trumped up charges of treason. Mentioned in books about the famous Tudor King Margaret's life, her accomplishments and her legacy are so often glossed over or worse completely ignored.

Luckily Higginbotham has written a detailed book exploring Margaret's life filling in all the blanks that have gone unwritten over the centuries. Starting from the turbulent time of the Wars of the Roses Higginbotham provides details of Margaret's parents, George, Duke of Clarence and Isabel Neville. Margaret's father was brother to King Edward IV and her mother was the daughter of Richard Neville, the Kingmaker. Margaret's Uncle and Aunt via her mother and father were Richard III and his wife Queen Anne, thus providing royalty on either side of Margaret's family tree. She was a woman born into turbulent times with royal blood running through her veins and this ultimately would set her on a collision course with King Henry VIII.

Higginbotham explores Margaret's younger years, what life would have been like after the death of her mother and then her father's execution for treason. She writes of Margaret's brother and how he too was put to death, this time under the order of the new Tudor King, Henry VII. Despite such a time of upheaval and loss Margaret continued to be loyal to her King and Susan Higginbotham provides an intricate picture of this time in Margaret's life.

Continuing on Higginbotham details Margaret's marriage, the birth of her children and her years as Governess to Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry VIII. I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the relationship between Margaret and Mary and how at times Margaret acted as a mother like figure to Mary when her own mother was set aside for Anne Boleyn.

Higginbotham writes of Margaret's children, her son Reginald Pole and his famous objection to Henry VIII's desire to have his marriage to Katherine of Aragon annulled. This put Margaret in a most difficult situation and yet she chose to stay loyal to her King and continue to do her duty as a faithful servant. Tragically her loyalty would come to mean nothing.

The last chapters of the book are dedicated to Margaret's tragic death at the age of almost seventy. Using primary sources such as testimonials and written accounts taken at the time Higginbotham explains the events that surrounded the arrest of Margaret's children and then finally herself. Tragically one of Margaret's sons was arrested and beheaded on the charge of treason. Another son attempted suicide twice while a prisoner in the Tower of London. Higginbotham provides details of the alleged charges that were put against Margaret and several written accounts of her tragic death at the hands of an inexperienced executioner.

It is most sad to know that a woman born of royal blood, who had been faithful and loyal to the King's she served, met such an unjustified and heartless death. In the final chapter Higginbotham details Margaret's legacy, her son Reginald's return to England and Margaret's beatification in 1886.

I thoroughly enjoyed Susan Higginbotham's book on Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury. It was a fascinating look at the life of a very interesting woman and I would strongly recommend it to anyone looking

to explore the lesser known people of the Tudor age.

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### **Deborah Pickstone says**

I had previously enjoyed Susan Higginbotham's novels and had high hopes of this biography of Margaret Pole, an unusual subject. Unfortunately, my hopes were disappointed. To be fair to the author, I was put off early by her clear anti-Richard III bias (what is it about female historians and Richard III - it seems to bring out the reactionary in them) whereas I am a Riccardian of many years standing. I base this assertion on her choice of the word 'claimed' regarding many of Richard's actions along with the absence of opposing facts from the text. For instance, Richard 'claimed' that he had evidence of his nephews' bastardy. He ignored Edward of Warwick's claim to the throne when it wasn't specified in the Act of Attainder against his father but she doesn't mention that *no-one* at the time would have considered that overturning one minor's claim to the throne in favour of another minor's claim - which was smudged with that attainder to boot - as a good idea. Thus it reads as if it were all Richard's idea and implies (to be fair, she doesn't *state*) that the throne was usurped. She tells several times how the Princes in the Tower disappeared from view under Richard but fails to mention there is no evidence to suggest he killed them. She writes of Richard coming south to take up the role of Lord Protector, as willed by Edward IV, as if he grabbed the Regency illegally from the actual usurpers of it, the Woodvilles. This is history by smoke and mirrors; written to make things appear to be rather than an account of what happened.

Eventually we get back to Margaret and for the most part read 'little is known' or 'nothing is known' but then she makes some odd assertion that seems hardly pertinent: my favourite of these is when Ms Higginbotham tells us about Margaret having prepared a memorial resting place for herself where she wasn't allowed to lie after being executed - "In this she is similar to Percy Bysshe Shelley, who likewise has a monument at Christchurch without having been buried there." What????!!! This is a pointless and irrelevant comment and the two aren't even comparable as Shelley did not commission his own monument. It does, however, epitomise this history as far as I am concerned.

So, I am most disappointed. Perhaps Ms Higginbotham should stick to writing HF, which is usually readable.

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### **Tony Riches says**

I should begin by saying I'm an avid reader of Susan Higginbotham's historical fiction, so I've been looking forward to reading her non-fiction biography of Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, one of the last surviving members of the House of York.

Perhaps unfairly, Margaret Pole is best remembered for her botched execution and a rather unflattering portrait of a thin-faced woman holding a sprig of honeysuckle blossom (a sign of love and faithfulness.) Interestingly, when I saw the portrait in the National Portrait Gallery, it had been classified as 'Unknown woman, formerly known as Margaret Pole'.

This new book should go some way to restoring Margaret Pole's place in Tudor History, as Susan has done an excellent job of setting out the facts of her complex life and explaining the historical context. Readable and informative, this book falls short of answering my question about why Margaret was executed at the age

of sixty-seven - but I suppose we will never know.

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## **Charity says**

Henry VII and I have something in common: cheapskates (unless it's something we really want! ... but even then, I suspect he also complained at shelling out \$\$, even if you ARE paying hundreds of thousands of pounds to get a traitor in your Tower).

So, when this book turned up on Kindle with what I consider to be a BIG price tag (nearly \$20, for an electronic book?!), I flinched -- and bought it anyway, since the Hardback has been stalled indefinitely and I need it for research.

I reserve the right to change my opinions later, with a more careful perusal of the book (I am rushing through it, due to time constraints on my end for another project) but as it stands, this seems to be a fairly thorough and informative read about Margaret Pole. I learned a few things I was unaware of in other resources, but also wondered why a few things are missing (for example: various sources claim Margaret Pole and Henry VIII had a "land dispute" without further detail in 1518; there is no mention of it here, unless it comes in the context of her later demands for the extended Warwick estate).

Margaret Pole was no fool. She was careful. Few people knew her true opinions, so what we do know of her (including her intense loyalty to Katharine of Aragon) comes from a few specific, isolated incidents, such as when she blatantly refused to turn over Princess Mary's jewels and plate when the king demanded them of her. This means historians have little insight into her personality, true opinions, or motivations, which makes writing a biography about her difficult. All you have to work with are documentation from other people in the period, dry reports of what she bought / her house accounts, a few letters, hearsay from the Spanish ambassador Chapuys (an unreliable narrator), and myths -- so, a lot of it becomes guesswork. We don't even know what her husband died of, or when it was, exactly. This author does fall into the biographical trap of insinuation from time to time ("Though we have no record of what Margaret actually thought, we can probably IMAGINE her reaction..."), which doesn't bother me, but...

Given there isn't much to go on about the subject, a lot of the book includes "filler" -- extensive details and background on the people around her, and the incidents that made up the circumstances surrounding her life. There's a lot about Henry VIII, Mary Tudor, Katharine of Aragon, and so on. If the reader has zero knowledge of any of it, in order to fully understand the court itself, the book needs this -- but if the reader is already familiar with all of this from other sources (Henry divorced his first wife to marry Anne, who was unpopular and fell from power), it becomes redundant. This means you're mostly paying for "History of the Tudor Period... with as much as anyone knows about the Pole Family."

Since I'm reading it for research purposes and not for fun, I skimmed a lot of the chapters where I knew most of the background information already, but it does have a straightforward, informative style that doesn't get bogged down too often in "boring" essentials.

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## **Charilee Keely Warmer says**

I really loved this book but was disappointed that it only went up to 60% on my kindle would have loved it

to be longer but it is a great read I finished this in two days that's how good it was I know it says different on good reads but I'm one of them that reads one book and straight to another I would recommend this it's just ashame it was so short I'd have loved to have given 5 Stars but I'm always honest on reviews

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### **Susan Abernethy says**

Link to my review of this book:

<https://flhwnotesandreviews.com/2017/...>

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